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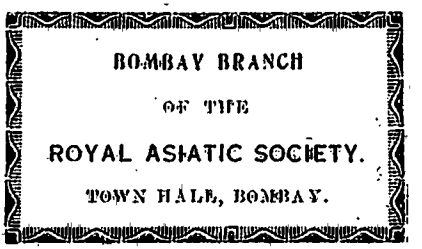

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MADAME DE MIRAMION.

Died at Paris March 24th 1696

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Life of Madame De
Miramion: ed by Mary
Elizabeth Herbert
by Bonneau

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a life of Madame de Miramion by Bonneau

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PREFACE TO THE TRANSLATION.

BY THE EDITOR.

WITHIN the lapse of the last two centuries two women have appeared, both French by birth and education, who have merited the glorious title of "Mothers of the Church and of the Poor." There is a singular coincidence between the lives of the Marchesa Giulia Falletti di Barolo, which the graceful pen of Lady Georgiana Fullerton has made known to the majority of English readers, and that of Madame de Miramion. Only that the former, until the hour of her death, still lived in the world, and was the centre of the highest and best society in Turin, and the latter lived humbly in her community, only going into the great world or to Court to

further her charitable projects. The great characteristic of both was the universality of their charity.

It may be said of Madame de Miramion that she was "The Mother of the Poor," from their cradle to their graves; for, from the Infant School to the Orphanage, and from the Orphanage to the Workroom, she never lost sight of their childhood or youth; while, in their sickness and old age, the Hospital, of which she was the main founder and supporter, received and succoured them, while her tender, thoughtful care provided them with all those spiritual consolations which soothed their dying beds, and prepared them for a better inheritance.

It is marvellous how much may be accomplished by one woman of earnest will when once she is set on fire by the love of God. Nor did she shrink from the weariness and annoyance inseparable not only from the care of all these charitable institutions, but from having to beg continually for their support.

When she had exhausted all her own means, she had no false shame in pleading for the help of others, and her importunity rarely went unrewarded. But the salvation of souls was her chief object; and so, ten years before the Foundation of the Paris Foreign Missionary College, which has now sent forth so many hundred labourers to preach the Gospel in heathen lands, Madame de Miramion had, at her own expense, chartered a ship and fitted it out with every comfort, to enable a small band of devoted men, with the Bishop of Heliopolis at their head, to go to China and preach to its pagan inhabitants. Whilst the vessel was preparing, Madame de Miramion gave up her own country house for eighteen months to the bishop and his future missionaries, that they might be duly prepared for their apostolic functions. And ever after she was the Providence of the Mission, providing not only money, but everything needed for the performance of the divine office in that distant land; and for the maintenance of schools and teachers, who

should bring those that were in darkness into the light of Gospel truth. Of all her great works this was the child of her predilection, and the one nearest her heart.

No one can go carefully through the different events of her life without a feeling of shame at the little effect which her example has produced on ourselves. At no period of history, perhaps, was human misery greater than at present; at no time were the powers of darkness so leagued against men and women to persuade them to lose their souls.

But where shall we find in London society a woman like Madame de Miramion, who, trampling under foot the conventionalities of birth and fashion, would be willing to sacrifice her whole life in stemming the torrent of evil, and saving those for whom Christ died?

Yet she did nothing, after all, very extraordinary. She did not become a nun, or shut herself up in a convent, or keep aloof from her own family and friends. She lived in her own house, devoted to her child, to her brothers,

and to her father and mother-in-law, to whom she was as an angel of light, soothing their dying beds, and paying them to the last the tenderest attention. Equally devoted was she to her many friends, by whom she was invariably summoned when the hour of sickness or sorrow came.

What then was the difference between her life and ours? It consisted in her *singleness of purpose.* She had one object in view—the glory of God; and this hidden motive actuated her in all she said or did, or left unsaid and undone.

Many of us have the same opportunities, the same advantages; most of us have far more health, for this brave woman endured uncomplainingly for thirteen years the torments of cancer, although the constant discomfort, sickness and pain to which it exposed her never induced her to stop or even to relax in one charitable undertaking or one pious exercise. And God almost miraculously preserved a life which was so precious for others. And she died at the

age of sixty-six, and was followed to the grave by the tears of the poor and the respect and veneration of all classes of society.

We may do the same if we will only *will* it.

Shall it be said that only Frenchwomen are capable of such heroism in daily life?

MARY ELIZABETH HERBERT.

WILTON,
May, 1870.

PREFACE.

FEW persons in the present day know even the name of Madame de Miramion, that virtuous lady of the seventeenth century, whose ardent piety made Madame de Sévigné entitle her "one of the mothers of the Church," and whose inexhaustible charity made the Duc de Saint-Simon say "that her death was considered a public loss."

Her life had nevertheless been written in former times by the Abbé de Choisy from the most authentic documents; but this work, published in 1707, and of which there were very few copies, is now scarcely to be met with. The author, being chiefly desirous to make a book of devotion for the edification of religious houses, followed no chronological order, and often interrupted the narrative by pages of Madame de Miramion's meditations, which completely destroyed this interest. This diffuseness, added to the old-fashioned typography, made it unattractive to general readers.

In modern times two novel writers, the Comtesse D—— and M. Hippolyte Lucas, have each published novels of which Madame Beauharnais de Miramion is the heroine. But these romances, though founded on a real episode in her life, give their readers the idea of something romantic and passionate in her character, which is contradicted by the austerity of her whole life.

Under these circumstances we have thought that a true history of the life and good works of Madame de Miramion, compiled from new documents, family papers, and from different authors who have spoken of her, will have an interest in the present day.

It seemed to us also that it would be useful amidst the indifference and selfishness of this nineteenth century to give a true picture of a life so full of abnegation and devotedness, especially when that life is one of a woman born in the midst of riches and luxury, and all that the world most cherishes, and who had the courage to throw aside everything—youth, beauty, position, comfort, and riches—in order to love God alone, and devote herself and her fortune to the alleviation of suffering and sorrow.

We have, therefore, endeavoured to revive this image which two centuries had faded, and recount the courageous actions, the fruitful works, and the numberless charities which this delicate and ailing woman accomplished, sustained only by her ardent faith, resolute will, and overflowing love.

But as Bossuet says: "We can in nowise con-

tribute by description to the glory of persons of extraordinary piety, and that their actions alone testify to their merit," we have only endeavoured faithfully to narrate the different events of this exemplary life.

May this narrative, which carries the reader through a memorable epoch in history, interest him sufficiently to make him overlook the imperfections of the work, and only dwell on the merits of a woman whose life is a useful lesson for us all.

May, 1870.

THE AUTHOR'S NOTICE.

THIS work, written by an inexperienced hand, was not intended for publication, and it required the encouragement of several competent persons, as well as the desire of devoting the profits to a charitable purpose, to induce us to let it appear in its present form.

The Church, who never forgets benefactors, was the first to welcome the life of her faithful servant, *Marie Bonneau de Miramion*; and on its first appearance this biography received a moral approbation of so much weight that no doubt remained as to the wisdom of its publication. We allude to the letters of approbation that His Holiness the Pope and several illustrious prelates have deigned to address to the author, but which are too long for insertion here.

The French Academy, by bestowing on this book one of the prizes destined by M. de Montyon for the

works most advantageous to public morals, has still further ensured its success.

Very few books indeed have been so favourably received by the public.

This approbation, which we did not venture to expect, imposes on us as a duty to correct and improve every new edition of the work with the greatest care.

In this one, which will be presented to the public of England and America through the translation of Madame la Baronne de Montaignac, we have endeavoured to take advantage of all the criticisms we have received, and to add such notes as should increase the interest of the book.

May, 1870.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	MADAME DE MIRAMION'S CHILDHOOD, 1629—1645	1
II.	HER MARRIAGE, 1645—1648	15
III.	ABDUCTION OF MADAME DE MIRAMION, 1648	28
IV.	THE COMTÈ DE BUSSY RABUTIN, 1648	45
V.	MADAME DE MIRAMION RESOLVES TO REMAIN A WIDOW, 1648—1649	61
VI.	HOW MADAME DE MIRAMION SANCTIFIES HER WIDOWHOOD, 1649—1653	84
VII.	MADEMOISELLE DE MIRAMION, 1653—1660	107
VIII.	MADAME DE MIRAMION PERPETUAL SUPERIORESS OF THE SISTERS OF SAINTE GENEVIEVE, 1660—1663	130
IX.	CHARITABLE WORKS OF MADAME DE MIRAMION, 1662—1670	155
X.	HER WRITINGS, 1670—1678	171
XI.	MADAME DE MIRAMION DIRECTRESS OF THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE, 1678—1682	204
XII.	BENEFACTRESS OF FOREIGN MISSIONS, 1682—1684	222
XIII.	DISTRIBUTOR OF THE KING'S ALMS, 1684—1690	239
XIV.	HER RELATIONS WITH THE COURT, 1690—1696	263
XV.	HER LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH, 1696	284
	APPENDIX	304

MADAME

DE

BEAUHARNAIS DE MIRAMION.

CHAPTER I.

MADAME DE MIRAMION'S CHILDHOOD.

1629—1645.

"Those arrayed in white robes are they which came out of great tribulation."—REVELATION.

I.

MADAME DE MIRAMION was born at Paris, on the 26th November, 1629. Her father, Jacques Bonneau, Lord of Rubelle, king's counsellor and secretary,* and her mother, Marie d'Ivry, of an ancient and noble family

* Jacques Bonneau, Lord of Rubelle and of Purnon, king's counsellor and secretary for the crown of France and the treasury, controller-general of the "*gabel*," and a sheriff of Paris, belonged to an ancient family of Poitou, which is still represented in that province, who had established themselves about 1550, one

of Melun, brought her up with the greatest care. But while they gave her a first-rate education, they also inspired her with those religious feelings in which they had themselves been brought up, and which they considered as the surest element of happiness.

"Thus," as justly remarks the Abbé de Choisy,* cousin and biographer of Madame de Miramion, from whom we shall often borrow in this narrative, "piety was not a strange quality to her, as she found it pre-eminently in her own family."

Her mother particularly, a lady of rare merit, but of delicate health, took much pains with her; and, as if she had had a presentiment that God would recall her prematurely to Himself, she endeavoured to impress on her daughter's heart those principles of piety which should sustain and guide her in after-life.

Mademoiselle de Rubelle was only nine years of age when she lost her mother,—"but her precocious intelligence made her feel this loss so deeply that she fell sick."

"Young as she was," says Choisy, "her reflections

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at Paris, and the other at Tours. M. Bonneau was descended from the second branch. He was grandson of Urphin Bonneau, procureur of the Presidial Court of Tours, in 1570, married to Anne de la Forge, and son of Thomas Bonneau, Lord du Garsois and du Plissis, Saint-Antoine, sheriff and mayor of Tours in 1604, married to Suzanne Robin.

The arms of this family are inscribed in the golden book (Livre d'Or) of the city of Paris, in 1577, and in the book of heraldry of the Mayors of Tours, in 1604, registered by D'Hozier in 1650.

* François Timoléon de Choisy, Prior of Saint Lô, Dean of the Cathedral of Bayeux, and member of the French Academy.

on this death were far in advance of her years. She understood for the first time the nothingness of everything on earth, and how dreadful must be an eternal separation from God, since a transient privation of the presence of those we love causes us such deep affliction."

Mademoiselle de Rubelle, however, soon recovered her health, but this wrenching asunder of her heart's first affection, and the idea of death at the beginning of life, made an impression upon her which was never afterwards effaced, and left on her mind, as well as on her countenance, a tinge of serious melancholy which nothing could entirely remove.

She regretted above all (as she wrote later in her *Confessions*) not to have loved her mother enough during the few years she was spared to her. But what loving heart has not experienced on this account, if not as much remorse, at least a similar regret? May it not often be said that we only appreciate thoroughly those we love twice in our life—at the hour of parting, or at that of death?

These regrets were, however, the fertile source from whence Mademoiselle de Rubelle drew those feelings of religion which were to be the joy and the consolation of her whole life; for from that moment she formed the resolution of imitating her mother in the fulfilment of those pious and charitable duties of which she had given her so bright an example.

Her governess, who was a person of great piety, and who strove to comfort her by speaking continually of submission to the will of God, contributed much to develop her natural inclination for religion. "God

bestowed many graces on me through the medium of this lady," said Madame de Miramion later, in speaking of her governess.

M. de Rubelle, left a widower with five children, and in a state of health which was aggravated by his grief for the loss of his wife, was uneasy at the solitude in which his numerous avocations would compel him to leave his daughter, and wishing to remedy this as much as possible, he accepted his brother's offer to go and live with him.

As soon as the period of seclusion usual in such afflictions was expired, M. de Rubelle, accompanied by his children and servants, went and settled themselves in the immense mansion that M. Bonneau inhabited in the Marais. There his sons were brought up with his nephews, while Madame Bonneau, a clever and accomplished woman, superintended at the same time the education of Mademoiselle de Rubelle and that of her own daughter.

But the atmosphere of this house, which breathed nothing but worldly tastes, riches, and luxury, with its numerous inmates and large household of servants, was very different from the calm and quiet home where Mademoiselle de Rubelle had previously lived with her pious mother.

M. Bonneau, lord de Plessis and de Valmer,* secretary and privy counsellor to the king, was a very estimable man, but exceedingly fond of society; and his wife, Mademoiselle Pallu du Ruau (of a good

* Valmer's castle in Touraine now belongs to the Baron de Chabrerfy.

family of Tours), did the honours of her house with that perfection which is rarely seen out of France.

The magistrates of Paris, a great many eminent financiers and literary men, and even members of the court, were to be met there. For at this period the "*haute bourgeoisie*," that is to say, men who had made large fortunes in trade, had acquired the habits of the upper class, and their society was neither less brilliant nor less amiable than that of the nobility.*

Already the celebrated hôtel Rambouillet, that focus of the wit and intelligence of France, had given birth to many successful imitations. The house of M. de Lamoignon, one of the eminent persons of the period, who had been the first to gather round him poets and learned men ; the drawing-room of Madame de la Sablière, La Fontaine's friend ; as well as the assemblies of Madame Cornuel, that *bourgeoise* so celebrated for her repartees, and several others may be cited as examples.

Madame Bonneau, who was a worldly woman and very fond of society, soon found that religious ideas had too much influence over her young niece ; and as she possessed the advantages of riches and beauty, and was at an age when most girls are fond of pleasure, she often took her to balls and plays, so as to divert her mind from serious thoughts.

* Among her most intimate friends, Madame Bonneau reckoned the pious Madame Fouquet de Vaux, mother of the Superintendent ; and the Présidente de Pommereuil, to whom Madame Scarron wrote :—"Madame de Bonneau is so much attached to you, and expresses it so warmly, that one feels ashamed not to have as much affection for you as she has."

Corneille was then giving the tragedies of Médée, Polyeucte, and the Cid, at the theatre of the Hôtel de Bourgoyne, tragedies worthy to inaugurate that immortal period which has since been called the age of Louis the Fourteenth.

It was said, "Tout Paris pour Chimène a les yeux de Rodrigue," and nothing could be truer. It is impossible now to form an idea of the enthusiasm which the appearance of these chefs-d'œuvre excited, representing as they did so nobly the distinctive traits of that period—heroism and gallantry.

Every one flocked to see them; for, in spite of the conspiracies and executions which preceded the end of the reign of Louis XIII. and the death of his great minister, Richelieu, the taste for intellectual pleasures had never been so great. Everything was gay, bustling, and joyous; it seemed as if the glory which was coming had cast its shadow beforehand.*

At first Mademoiselle de Rubelle enjoyed herself at the theatre, and had a great taste for it. Her lively imagination was carried away by those high-flown sentiments expressed in such beautiful language, but her more sober judgment soon made her see the danger of these impassioned fictions, while she experienced the hollowness and disenchantment which they leave in the heart. God, who had chosen this heart and mind for Himself, watched over her and

* Richelieu died on the 2nd December, 1642, after having witnessed the execution of Cinq Mars; and Louis XIII. on the 14th May, 1643, just as Condé was going to fight the battle of Rocroy.

preserved her from being led away by false pleasures. It was true that at first she amused herself very much at balls, on account of the music and dancing,* for she had a very correct ear and danced gracefully; but she soon grew weary of these brilliant gatherings, where dancing was only a pretext for flirtations and vanity.

They had amused her head and eyes for the moment, but they could not dissipate the sadness with which her heart was filled, nor do away with the melancholy which was so dear to her. Often in the midst of the amusements of her age which her aunt was always willing to provide for her, or when she shared in her brothers' childish sports, the image of her dying mother and the memory of her virtues were still uppermost in her thoughts, and inspired her with fresh ardour for a life of piety and quiet.

"I think of death continually," she said to her governess, "and while all around me only care about amusing themselves, I ask myself, 'Should I like to die at this moment?'"

"What grace God has given you, Mademoiselle," replied this pious woman, "to inspire you thus early with such wise thoughts! Do not fail to correspond with it, and think of all the dangers to which you are exposed in the midst of these worldly amusements. The saints, you know, often wore hair shirts and iron chains under their clothes in order that the pain they suffered might make them indifferent to what passed around them."

This advice produced such an effect on the mind of

* The *passe-pieds* and the minuet.

Mademoiselle de Rubelle that from that day she resolved to mortify herself by privations and sufferings of all kinds, even in the midst of worldly pleasures, and to cease to take any part in them as soon as she should be her own mistress. Afterwards, when her aunt took her to balls, she always wore under her dress a thick iron chain which she had procured in secret with her own pocket-money; and if she went to the theatre she shut her eyes, but when her aunt laughed she turned round and laughed also, as if she were paying attention to the play.

When she was only twelve years old her greatest pleasure was to nurse those who were sick in the house, and to amuse them by reading aloud to them some interesting book during her play-time.

It happened one day on Twelfth-night that a stable-man in her father's employment was dying; and while every-one was having some fun in her aunt's drawing-room, she slipped away to go and see after him. His agony was terrible, and accompanied by horrible convulsions. While they were seeking for her everywhere to open the ball she arrived, but pale and trembling, and full of the image of death which she had just seen in all its horrors. She refused to dance, and as her face betrayed suffering she was allowed to retire to her own room. There, while the others were amusing themselves, she gave free course to her tears, and prayed with all her heart for the soul of the poor servant.

II.

IN the month of July of the year 1643 Madame Bonneau, whose health required a course of mineral waters,

took Mademoiselle de Rubelle with her to Forges, in Normandy, where some of the best society in Paris were assembled. It seems that the fashion of drinking mineral waters is not new, and that the kind of life led there then, was pretty much the same as now, if we may judge by the reflections made on the subject by the Abbé de Choisy more than two centuries ago.

"It is well known," he says, "how dangerous these places are. A multitude of idle persons flock together from all parts of the kingdom, occupied exclusively by the care of their health, who often conceal the most violent passions under the appearance of a delicate constitution, and who make it a rule to be always in company, to think of nothing serious, and to neglect all religious practices, while they consider it the one object of life to be amused; thus giving the devil a thousand opportunities to enervate and imperil their souls. How often this has been proved by fatal experience, and how many have lost eternal life in seeking for bodily health!" Mademoiselle de Rubelle, however, preserved in this dangerous atmosphere not only her usual modesty and simplicity, but the same fidelity and regularity in the fulfilment of her religious duties.

This journey, which Madame Bonneau performed according to the fashion of those times, by short stages in her coach, with her niece, her daughter, and their two governesses, accompanied by a number of men-servants on horseback, and stopping in the towns of St. Germain, Nantes, and Rouen, was a constant delight to Mademoiselle de Rubelle, who had never left Paris before.

During their stay at Forges, where there was always a large influx of visitors since the Queen (Anne of Austria) had brought these waters into fashion, the two young ladies often met, at the spring of la Reinette, Mademoiselle Charlotte de Daillon, daughter of the Comte de Lude, whose cleverness and beauty gave promise of the success she was to obtain later at Court. To know, to like, and then to begin to love one another are easy stages at that age, and the three young girls soon became intimate friends. Mademoiselle de Rubelle especially, who was a little older than her cousin, and endowed with the most attractive qualities, inspired Mademoiselle de Daillon with so lasting an esteem and affection that fifteen years afterwards, when she was the beautiful Duchess de Roquelaure, and dying, (the sad victim of an unfortunate attachment), she remembered this friend of her youth, implored her to come to her, and thought herself happy to die in her arms.

Mademoiselle de Rubelle was still in Normandy when her father, worn out by grief, fell dangerously ill, and died before she could arrive at Paris.

Her sorrow was very great, but as she had learned to adore the Hand which chastised her, her grief, instead of casting her down, only increased her ardent piety, and gave her the desire to consecrate herself to God by becoming a Carmelite.

This severe order of nuns of Mount Carmel, introduced into Paris from Spain in 1602 by Madame Acarie, had at once obtained a high reputation for piety; and the magnificent monastery which it occupied in the street of St. Jacques, founded by queens

and princesses who had their apartments and tombs there, was already famous before the repentance of the Duchesses de Longueville and de la Valière rendered it still more celebrated.*

Madame Bonneau, who, though living in worldly society, performed her religious duties with the regularity formerly observed in the higher classes, had often taken her niece to assist at the services in the chapel of this convent. The convents of that period, where almost every family of rank had some relative, did not keep strict enclosure. People went there to make retreats, to obtain advice or prayers, and to assist at the taking of the habit of the nuns. Mademoiselle de Rubelle, some days before her departure for Forges, had assisted in this Carmelite convent at the taking of the veil by a young lady she knew, and this imposing ceremony, at which several ladies of the Court were present, had made a lively impression upon her. Amidst the clouds of incense and the music of the organ this magnificent sanctuary, with its exquisite sculpture and paintings, appeared to her as God's chosen home, and the most desirable refuge to be found upon earth.

Her aunt, whom she informed of her purpose, thought it better not to oppose it at first; but M. Bonneau, who loved his niece with a father's

* It extended from the Rue St. Jacques to the Rue d'Enfer, where the entrance still exists, No. 67. "It was an immense building, in an airy situation, with a numerous community, all women of rank and intelligence, who knew the world well and despised it; this is what makes good nuns."—*Mademoiselle de Montpensier.*

tenderness, could not conceal from her the pain which such a determination would cause him. He spoke to her especially of her affection for and duty to her brothers; of the services she would be able to render them by remaining in the world, and by marrying according to her rank and fortune.

These reflections, which she was too young to make for herself,—the idea of the separation, which had not yet come across her mind,—and, above all, the hope of being useful to her brothers, made her give up her intention. "And as God," says the Abbé de Choisy, "had gifted her with equal intelligence and firmness, she undertook, although only fourteen and a half, to place herself at the head of her orphan family, and supply to her younger brothers the parents of whom they had been so early deprived.

"She became from this moment and continued all her life to be the tie which maintained a perfect union amongst them."

She had four brothers, whose history we will rapidly sketch here, having no further occasion to speak of them.

The eldest was Toussaint Bonneau, Lord of Rubelle,* who was then twenty-two. He became soon afterwards a counsellor to the Parliament of Paris, and had an only daughter, married in 1684 to the Marquis de la Hoguette.

The second, Charles Bonneau, Lord of Bellefond, was eighteen; he died young and unmarried.

* The château of Rubelle, near Melun, had been brought as a marriage portion by Marie d'Ivry to her husband, Jacques Bonneau, Esquire, Lord of Purnon and of Rubelle.

The third, Henri Bonneau, Lord of Tracy, was only ten, and his delicate health, together with his sweet disposition, made him Mademoiselle de Rubelle's pet child. (He became Captain in the Guards, Camp-Marshall, Governor of Tournai, and was killed at the seige of Landrecy in 1655.)

The youngest, Claude Bonneau, Lord of Purnon,* was eight years of age. (He became chamberlain and first steward to Monsieur, the King's brother; he married in 1703 Anne du Tillet, and died in 1721 without issue.)

"There never was so united a family," says Choisy, "and nobody interfered in the division of their property, which was, however, considerable. Indeed the only quarrel between them was because each wished to give a larger share to the other."

After her father's death Mademoiselle de Rubelle obtained permission to remain eighteen months without going into society. This term of mourning, which would have appeared long to any one else, seemed too short to her, such was her taste for retirement and serious occupations.

With her brothers and her cousins, and in the same house as herself, lived a young abbé, M. François Pallu, Madame Bonneau's nephew, who was afterwards the first French bishop sent out to China, under the title of the Bishop of Heliopolis. This learned priest already gave proofs of the ardent faith which was to urge him to go and preach the Gospel to the

* The manor of Purnon, near Mirebeau, in Poitou, was an ancient estate of the Bonneau family.

heathen. Mademoiselle de Rubelle, every time she met him at her aunt's, was delighted with his conversation. Perhaps the apostolic zeal and eloquence of one so entirely devoted to God, contributed not a little to develop in her heart those sentiments of piety and fervent charity of which her mother had laid the foundation.

Thus passed Madame de Miramion's childhood in the midst of painful trials and home sorrows, in which school all the grand and noble qualities of her nature were strengthened and developed. She grew up in the midst of all the fascinations of the great world without being absorbed by them, advancing alone with a firm step on that path which was to lead her upwards to her Father's home. "A worthy beginning," says her biographer, "of a worthy life."

CHAPTER II.

MADAME DE MIRAMION'S MARRIAGE.
1645—1648.

"I closed my arms, but I had already lost what I held."—*S. Ambr. Orat. de ob Sat. fr.*

I.

MADEMOISELLE DE RUBELLE was hardly fifteen when her aunt, according to the custom of that period,* presented her at Court. She had already all the characteristics of real beauty,—not of that fashionable kind powdered and perfumed, which was adored by the marquises of the eighteenth century, but of that perfect beauty of which Raphael and Leonard de Vinci have given us the ideal, which united physical strength with delicate features, and purity of form with perfect elegance. She was tall, with a beautiful figure, which was improved by a slight *embonpoint*; but her height did not take away from her gracefulness. Her complexion was of a dazzling whiteness,

* Mademoiselle de Sévigné was also only sixteen when her mother presented her at Court in 1663.

heightened by a brilliant colour which came and went continually; her nose was aquiline, rather long, but well-made; her mouth small, rosy, and smiling. To add to the brilliancy of her beauty, her eyebrows were perfectly arched, and she had the finest eyes in the world. They were dark-blue, almond-shaped, brilliant and vivacious; but the sweet melancholy and exquisite gentleness which filled her heart often shewed itself in her eyes, and gave them a most angelic expression. Add to these features nut-brown hair curling naturally in large ringlets, a modest and noble carriage which at once inspired both love and respect, and above all an intelligent face, which indicated a mind naturally gifted, highly cultivated, and adorned with all the accomplishments of her sex, and you will have the exact portrait of Mademoiselle de Rubelle.*

But nature had not only lavished on her all these external advantages, but had also endowed her with the most precious qualities of mind and heart. Her judgment was honest and sound, and her imagination lively and fertile. She talked well and naturally. Perhaps —for every one has some defects—she was rather proud in manner; but this appearance of haughtiness, which very regular features often gives, was modified by the sweetness of her voice and that exquisite elegance of manners which then so particularly distinguished the higher classes of society in France.

* Portrait traced by the Abbé de Choisy in his manuscript history of the Princess Aimonnette, and completed by the description of the portrait painted by De Troy, which is still to be seen in the château of Marsay, in Poitou, the residence of the Marquis de la Messelière, M. de Purnon's heir.

Everywhere her grace and beauty, even more than her immense fortune,* attracted a crowd of young men who sued for the honour of obtaining her hand.

But already Mademoiselle de Rubelle had remarked at the church of Saint Nicholas-des-Champs M. de Miramion, who often accompanied his mother, a lady of exemplary piety and charity; and the respectful deference with which he treated her had predisposed Mademoiselle de Rubelle in his favour.

Therefore, when among the suitors proposed to her by her family she heard the name of M. de Miramion, her blushes discovered to everyone the person whom her heart had chosen.

On the 27th of April, 1645, she married Jean Jacques de Beauharnais, Lord of Miramion and of La Canarde, counsellor to the Paris parliament, only son of Messire Aignan de Beauharnais de Miramion, Counsellor of State, Controller-general of the War Department and of the high and mighty lady Marguerite de Choisy, of a noble and already celebrated Orleans family, whose posterity was to inherit several European thrones.† M. de Miramion was not quite

* The Comte de Bussy-Rabutin in his Memoirs says she possessed four hundred thousand crowns, which at that period was equivalent to two million eight hundred thousand francs, in English money a hundred and twelve thousand pounds.

† The Duke de Saint Simon in his Memoirs says, in speaking of Madame de Miramion, that she had married a very rich *bourgeois* of Orleans, whose father had obtained letters patent to change his name to that of Beauharnais. But this is a palpable error, for the family of Beauharnais never had any other patronymic name, and was derived from Gillaume de

twenty-seven years of age: he was handsome, well-made, of a charming character, and with a fortune equal to that of his wife. He was what was called all through the seventeenth century, "*un parfait honnête homme*," which then meant, having noble feelings, and being brave, honourable, liberal, and witty. This well-assorted marriage gave Madame de Miramion intense happiness: she loved and was beloved, while they were equally united in the love of God. She had only one wish, and that was to merit by the innocency of her life and the purity of her soul that the blessings showered upon her in this world should not prove prejudicial to the hopes she had formed for the next.

She entreated M. de Miramion to allow her to continue the pious habits to which she was accustomed, and spoke to him on the subject of religion with such tender and loving earnestness as to touch his heart. He loved her all the more for it, and promised her not only to abstain from interference in her religious practices, but also to do nothing himself to pain her in the matter.

Some days after her marriage, Madame de Miramion bade a tearful adieu to her brothers, and left her uncle's home to go and live with her husband's parents in the house of M. de Choisy, her husband's grandfather.

M. de Choisy, Lord of Balcroy, counsellor of State,

Beauharnais, Lord de Miramion and de la Chaussée, who lived in 1380, and whose son, Jehan de Beauharnais, figures as a witness in the process for the justification of Jeanne d'Arc.

who had long been the friend as well as the counsellor of the Kings Henri IV. and Louis XIII., was treated at the Court with the greatest consideration, and his wife, Madeleine le Charron, a person of eminent virtue, was the tenderest and most devoted of mothers. These two respectable old people were never afterwards separated from their daughters Mesdames de Miramion and de Caumartin, who inhabited with them a magnificent mansion situated at the corner of the Rue du Temple, and of the Rue Michel le Comte in the parish of St. Nicholas des Champs.*

Madame de Caumartin (whose husband, a counsellor of State and ambassador at Venice, died in 1624) had an only son, and as he was of the same age as M. de Miramion, the two cousins were brought up together, and loved each other like brothers.

This family, who lived in such a patriarchal way, under the hospitable roof of M. de Choisy, welcomed the young bride with the greatest joy. Every one desired to receive her and entertain her in their turn, and during several weeks she was in a perfect whirl of presentations, suppers, and pleasures of every kind. Among the rest Madame la Comtesse de Choisy, M. de Miramion's aunt, gave a magnificent collation at the Luxembourg on this occasion.

* This hotel was afterwards known by the name of Hôtel de Caumartin, because it fell to the share of that family, who resided in it for a long time.

II.

MADAME DE CHOISY (granddaughter of the Chancellor of the Hospital), whose husband was then Chancellor to the Duke Gaston d'Orleans, brother of Louis XIII., was, it is well known, one of the women who by their graceful and vivacious wit formed the ornament of the seventeenth century; she did the honours of all the fêtes that the Duke of Orleans was compelled to offer to his nephew Louis XIV. in order to put him in good humour, and as she had great conversational powers, brilliant wit, and perfect manners, no lady in France was so capable as herself to teach the young king, to whom she one day said, "Sire, you will never be a gentleman* if you do not spend an hour at least every day with me!" And the young king did so; and in acknowledgment of her services gave her in after years a pension of eight thousand pounds.

Her drawing-room in the Luxembourg was celebrated; Corneille read "*Cinna*" there, and the Comte de Bussy his "*Maximes d'amour.*" The Queens of Poland and of Sweden were in constant and intimate correspondence with her. In a word the Duchess of Montpensier, who knew her well, has sketched her portrait as follows: "Your mind is lively and agreeable, more so than that of any one I know; you speak with both accuracy and refinement; no one tells a story more amusingly and more cleverly than

* That is to say, perfectly accomplished in refined gallantry and elegance of manners.

yourself; your conversation has a wonderful charm although you are neither sarcastic nor slanderous. No one has a better right than yourself to give an opinion on persons or things." After this it will be easily understood that few persons united in the same degree so many eminent qualities.

If Madame de Miramion had been worldly-minded nothing would have been easier than to satisfy her inclinations under the brilliant patronage of her amiable aunt. But far from desiring the success that was due to her beauty, she was, as it were, afraid of it, and all that she cared for were the pure joys of home, and that retirement in which she had promised herself to live as soon as she should be free to do so.

M. de Miramion, on the contrary, did not dislike society; but as he had early tasted all the pleasures it offers, he began to feel the lassitude and satiety which a worldly and unoccupied life always entails. The pure happiness which he experienced in his young wife greatly diminished his taste for the world, and kept him ever with one whose sweet and gentle piety brought him daily nearer to God. For in all strong emotions, whether of joy or sorrow, our hearts instinctively draw nearer to the Creator.

"I gave up playing cards and going to balls and theatres," writes Madame de Miramion in speaking of this season of her wedded life, "which caused great surprise. I began a regular life; I won over my husband and persuaded him to live as a good Christian. We were very united and much beloved by our family, with whom we never had any disagreement except from their efforts to make me amuse myself."

Nothing, indeed, was more calculated to astonish worldlings than to see such goodness in so young a couple. United in a holy affection, full of humility and purity before God, of charity and good-will towards men, and of love to each other, but of a love which drew them both nearer to God, they seemed to realise the charming picture which the great Catholic poet Dante has drawn of a heavenly marriage:

> " La lor concordia, e i lor lieti sembianti,
> Amore e maraviglia e dolce sguardo
> Faceano esser cagion de pensier santi."

Six months (only six months!) passed in the enjoyment of this great happiness. At the end of that time, M. de Miramion was attacked by a violent fever, accompanied by inflammation of the lungs, and his life was at once despaired of.

He met death with a courage and resignation which Christian faith can alone inspire.

The last words of M. de Miramion to his wife have not been recorded; but he might have said to her as the Duke of Thuringia did to St. Elizabeth of Hungary, " May God bless thee, dear little Elizabeth, my beloved wife, my sweetest treasure! May the faithful God sustain thy soul and thy courage; may He also bless the child thou carriest under thy heart. Adieu! remember our wedded life, our tender and holy love, and never forget me in thy prayers; adieu!" For when he died, on the 2nd of November, 1645, his widow, like the Duchess of Thuringia, had been *enceinte* for four months and a half.

Few hearts had been so entirely united as Madame

de Miramion and her husband; it seemed as if their two existences had formed but one, and that his death would be a signal for her own. She sank down without a word or a cry, and fainted away on the dead body of her husband, remaining so many hours insensible that it was feared she would never recover. At last she came to herself, but was so cold, so weak, and so motionless, that but for the beating of her heart those around her would have believed her to be already dead.

Laid out on her bed without speech or tears, she seemed to be in a kind of trance, refusing to take anything that was offered to her. The words, "Drink, for your child's sake," murmured by her mother-in-law, who sought in this frail hope to give her courage to bear her fate, alone roused her.

"Yes, I must wait until another existence is separated from mine," she replied, and afterwards she submitted mechanically to all that was prescribed for her.

III.

WE have seen Madame de Miramion a happy and much-loved wife; we must now look upon her as a broken-hearted widow of sixteen, condemned to that unutterable solitude and loneliness of heart, which form the bitterest portion of widowhood. And now, who will give her the strength necessary to support such a trial? Who will console her in her misery? Who will henceforward sustain her in the path of life? Her past life will answer for her. He whom she

served in her days of joy and happiness will be with her now in her hour of desolation. He will henceforth be her spouse ; He who gave to His own mother the strength to follow Him to Calvary !

And in the midst of her agony and of that painful crisis in which nature endeavours in vain to battle with grief, Madame de Miramion felt her heart, now dead to all the joys of earth, revive to the love of God. Penetrated with a new humility and tenderness towards Him, she experienced, as it were, a fresh and overflowing sympathy for all who suffered. Oh ! the joys of sacrifice, the secret charms of suffering, how admirable are these mysterious ways of Providence !

Some people seem to imagine that they have no other object in life than to be happy, and that when misfortune has once fallen upon them they have nothing left but tears and useless regret. This is not the teaching of the Saints. God forbids us to give way too much to a misfortune which can be borne, or to throw away at the outset the intelligence and strength He has given us to labour for Him and for the salvation of souls. We must look higher and further than our own miserable selves, and if happiness be denied to us let us at least strive to impart it to others.

But if religion and maternal love could give Madame de Miramion the courage to live, her constitution, which had been seriously shaken by so severe a shock, had great difficulty in rallying. She was often seriously ill. and was forced to pass the whole time of her *grossesse* in bed, during which—from the ignorant treatment of those days—she was bled nine times.

After forty-six hours of suffering, and when her medical men despaired of saving her life, she made a vow to the Blessed Virgin in order to obtain the grace of seeing her child alive and baptized. Her prayer was granted, and on the 7th of March, 1646, she gave birth to a daughter. The first time that her babe was brought to her, and that as she embraced it she traced her husband's image in its tiny features, tears—the relief of which had so long been denied to her—rushed in torrents from her eyes. The baby unfortunately had suffered much in her terrible confinement, and was born so weak and delicate that it was only kept alive by the most constant care. The thought of being necessary to one so dear to her, and as it were a part of him whom she had lost, renewed Madame de Miramion's strength and courage, and gradually she came back to life for the sake of her child. What a miracle is the human heart, and on how little it can feed itself!

Madame de Miramion passed the first two years of her widowhood in the most complete seclusion, and divided her time between God's house, the poor, and her child's cradle.

About this time, says the Abbé de Choisy, she experienced what most women look upon as the worst of trials. She was a beauty, and she had the small-pox ;* her life was in danger, and she ran the risk of losing her sight. But nothing alarmed her; death, ugliness, even blindness, were not capable of disturb-

* This disease was then very dangerous and much dreaded, above all by ladies, whose beauty always ran a great risk.

ing her peace, and her submission to the will of God made her perfectly calm.

"Do not weep," she said to her mother-in-law who was beside her bed; "are a perishable beauty and a useless life worthy of these tears?" Her only uneasiness was about her daughter, who had been separated from her; her only privation was not daring to see her.

She got well most unexpectedly; her sight was preserved, and as her face was unmarked, her beauty remained, but it had lost its brilliancy. She appeared indifferent to a loss which to many women would have been the greatest of all. On the contrary this accident seemed to her a sort of manifestation of the will of God. She hoped that the world, finding her less lovely, would cease to care for her, and would allow her to put into execution the plans she had formed for advancing towards perfection.

Seeing her so piously disposed, all her relations, who loved her dearly, feared that she would become a nun. They very much wished to keep her with them, and her extreme youth made them hope that the same means they had used after her father's death would succeed a second time. They allowed her at first to give way to her grief; but then, hoping it would become modified by time, they urged her to contract a second marriage.

Brilliant suitors presented themselves, and were each day proposed to her. Several of them regretted in seeing her so beautiful that she was also so rich, fearing that her fortune might prove an obstacle to their wishes, or cause the sincerity of their love to be suspected.

One day Madame Cornuel, who was celebrated for the vivacity of her wit, having met Madame de Miramion in M. de Choisy's drawing-room, was so struck with the admirable beauty of her face, although still pale and grief-stricken, that she exclaimed, "If that magnificent statue chose to prove that she is as intelligent as she is beautiful, she would turn the heads of all the Court."

But her resolution, so far as a second marriage was concerned, was not to be shaken. She never lost an opportunity of expressing her abhorrence of it, in order that those who paid her attentions should give up all idea of success.

She often blamed herself in the presence of her family for the feelings she involuntarily inspired, and expressed her regret at it. But, deeply touched by the disinterested attachment of her relatives, she did not dare to close her door on the suitors whom they presented to her.

Her humility made her fancy also that she was not worthy to consecrate herself to God in religion. She seemed to hesitate, and begged for time to decide on what she would do.

In the mean time she multiplied her prayers and devotions, in the hope that God would inspire her and reveal His will to her.

CHAPTER III.

ABDUCTION OF MADAME DE MIRAMION.

1648.

"God granted me much grace; I did not lose the use of my judgment, and He gave me such courage as could only come from Himself."—*Madame de Miramion.*

TWO years had passed away since the death of M. de Miramion, and his widow still mourned for him as at first. Dressed in deep mourning in spite of the severe etiquette of that period,* she had not yet left the retirement in which she delighted, although she concealed her grief from every eye in order to hug it more completely to her heart. Her daughter, whose health was very delicate, had passed a sad winter. An inflammation of the lungs had endangered her life, and she had been saved only by the assiduous care of her mother. But this frail existence which had been prolonged by her prayers and tears became still more

* Widows wore mourning two years with a widow's peak; but after the expiration of the mourning no one dressed in black, which was considered too mournful a colour.

precious to her: and when it first lisped the name of "mother," she felt that henceforward her own life was bound up in one far dearer to her than herself. The poet has said:

"Nous n'existons vraiment que par ces petits êtres
Qui dans tout notre cœur s'établissent en maîtres.
Qui prennent notre vie et ne s'en dontent pas,
Et n'ont qu'à vivre heureux pour ne pas être ingrats."

This tenderness, which increased daily, and the constant fear she had of losing her child, revived in her heart the memory of her husband, and she often shed bitter tears; but with her habitual delicacy of conscience she blamed herself for it afterwards, and accused herself of a want of resignation and faith.

"But tears in themselves cannot be a subject of reproach for us, for our divine Saviour Himself did not fear to shed them. He went further, for He attached a special blessing to them: 'Blessed are they that weep.' If in the midst of the bitter sacrifices God requires from us, our heart did not feel deeply, where would be the merit? and upon what could we ground our hope? It is then quite as much in the order of grace as of that of nature, that the loss of those we love should affect us deeply, and that it should change and afflict us, because it is in the midst of this sorrow that the power of faith over our hearts shows itself the most strongly. It is by resignation, and the yielding up of our will to Him, in spite of our desolation, that we can offer the sacrifice most agreeable to God. It is in this condition that we become

the objects of His satisfaction, and that He looks upon us with the greatest tenderness."*

We have now arrived at the spring of the year 1648, a stormy year which saw the troubles of the Fronde. The nature and intent of this work will not permit of our entering into any details upon this strange and *piquant* episode of history. We will only say a few words of the principal events which had taken place between the childhood of Madame de Miramion and this eventful period.

Although our lives may be retired and unmixed with public affairs, we are influenced in spite of ourselves by the political events which agitate the period in which we live; so that it seems to us that in order to put ourselves in the position of those of whom we are writing, it is necessary to revert to the great political events which took place in their time.

After the death of Louis XIII., his widow, Anne of Austria, had been declared by the Parliament absolute regent of the kingdom during the minority of her son, Louis XIV., who was then ten years of age. The first years of the regency were made glorious by the victories of Rocroy, Fribourg and Nordlingen, which the young Prince of Condé won as if in play. Never until then had so many and such brilliant battles been gained in France with so much ease and courage. The court, triumphant, gave itself up to amusement; and the queen, whose grace, wit, and goodness, were extolled by every one, reigned happy in the midst of this court, which was then the most polished in the world.

* Letter from the Abbé Edgeworth, Louis the Sixteenth's confessor, to Madame de Montagu.

Of this time Saint-Evremond writes:

"Le temps de la bonne Régence,
Temps où la ville aussi bien que la cour
Ne respirait que les jeux et l'amour.

But to this "golden age," which has been sung by so many poets, entirely engrossed by pleasure and refined gallantry, had succeeded the dissensions of civil war. Anne of Austria, the good queen, as she was at first called, had made the Cardinal Mazarin master of France as well as of herself, and as, since the death of the great King Henri IV., the finances had been badly administered, endeavours were now made to restore them to order. With this intention the superintendent Eméri invented various ridiculous and annoying expedients, which raised a general outcry, and made the cardinal universally detested. The new edicts were opposed by the parliament, which thus strengthened the confidence of the people. For at that time the inhabitants of Paris and all those who were connected with the gentlemen of the robe, looked upon Parliament as an august body rendering impartial justice, considering only the welfare of the state, and keeping an equal distance between the king and the people. It was called in fact the "Father of the people." And so began that parliamentary league which, under the name of the Fronde, was soon to become absolute master of Paris, and bring upon France all the horrors of civil war.

The family of Madame de Miramion, who were all in the magistrature, naturally took part with the Fronde, and M. de Choisy, her grandfather, displeased

at the resistance of the court, and alarmed at the agitation which reigned at Paris, left it with all his family to go to a country-house which he possessed at Issy, in that delicious valley of the Seine, of which Madame de Sévigné says, "We were yesterday at Issy, where the nightingales, the hawthorn, the fountains, and the fine weather, gave us all the innocent pleasure it is possible to enjoy."

Madame de Miramion, whom the calm and silence of the country suited much better than the noise and bustle of Paris, delighted in the pleasant shades of Issy. She found there a refuge from external annoyance and inward grief. The habitation of M. de Choisy, well-built, large, and comfortable, surrounded with gardens and beautiful woods, was a charming abode, and rendered still more agreeable by the presence of numerous visitors. But there, as elsewhere, Madame de Miramion kept out of the gay world, occupying herself solely with God and her daughter. Having her time entirely at her own disposal, and being mistress of her own fortune, she often left M. de Choisy's drawing-room, and the most distinguished society, to go and visit the poor, or minister to the sick. The Abbé de Choisy informs us that, as she had a great repugnance to dirt and bad smells, she compelled herself, in order to mortify and conquer her natural inclinations, to seek out such diseases as produced disgusting and repulsive sores; and during her stay at Issy, though only nineteen, she every day dressed the sores of a little girl who had a scald-head, and whom no one would touch. She cured the child by her constant care, and took such interest in her

that after having put her to school in a convent, she afterwards, finding she had a vocation for the order, gave her a dowry to become a nun.

II.

SUCH were the pious occupations in which Madame de Miramion had already passed part of the summer, when she resolved to fulfil a vow she had made during her daughter's last illness, and go on a pilgrimage to the chapel of Mont Valérien. Some persons had warned her indirectly that a plan had been formed to carry her off by force, in order to compel her to marry again; but as the person who was audacious enough to form such a project was not named to her, and that among her suitors, whom she knew well, not one could be suspected of harbouring such guilty designs, she did not believe what was said to her, as she could not imagine it was possible to carry people off without their consent. Accordingly on the 7th August, 1648, Madame de Miramion, whose thoughts were engrossed by the religious action she was going to perform, left Issy at seven in the morning to go to Mont Valérien. In the carriage with her were her mother-in-law, an equerry, and two maids; for it was then usual for ladies of rank never to go out without being accompanied by an elderly lady and an equerry of a certain age. Behind the coach was a footman, young, but very devoted to Madame de Miramion, and four men-servants on horseback rode at the carriage-doors.

This escort, which would appear formidable now-a-

days, was not at all extraordinary at a period when noblemen of high rank were always surrounded with a large number of pages and guards.*

It was very hot, and in order to enjoy the magnificent view of the windings of the Seine from the heights of St. Cloud, they had drawn up the *mantelets*, a kind of leather curtain which replaced the glass now used in our close carriages. They were already arrived at a quarter of a league from Mont Valérien, when all of a sudden the coach was surrounded and stopped by twenty men on horseback. The four mounted servants who escorted them, on perceiving these horsemen masked and well-armed, galloped away as fast as their horses could carry them, the footman alone remaining at his post. The coachman was thrown down from his seat, and one of the men on horseback took his place, whilst two others came up to the coach and tried to pull down the leather curtains in order to prevent the prisoners from seeing which way they were taken, as well as to prevent their cries from being heard. But Madame de Miramion, who had recommended herself to God when she perceived she had fallen into a *guet apens*, stood up, and seizing the large bag of embroidered velvet containing her prayer-book which her maid carried, struck several blows with it on the faces and hands of her ravishers, scream-

* Madame de Sévigné wrote to her daughter more than twenty years afterwards, the 22nd of February, 1674: "You must not bring any pages with you, they are provincial goods which are not used here; you must have no suite, no officers; only six footmen."

ing for help as loud as she could. The men then drew their swords and cut the straps which held up the curtains; she tried to snatch their weapons from them, but failed, while her hands were cut and covered with blood. Her mother-in-law, more successful, seized one of the swords, and wounded its owner severely in the arm. As for the two maids, they were half dead with fear, and did nothing but mutter prayers, while the old equerry seemed changed into a statue. During this unequal combat, the squadron after having recrossed the bridge of St. Cloud entered the Bois de Boulogne, where six fresh horses were waiting, which were put to at once and the carriage was carried off with fresh rapidity.

As soon as she found herself thus seized by force Madame de Miramion asked God to preserve her in full possession of her judgment, to give her the strength and courage necessary to defend herself, and above all the grace not to offend Him, or to lose sight of His presence. After this short prayer, which was more mental than vocal, she began to call out that she was Madame de Miramion, that she was being carried off by force, and implored the passers-by to go to Paris and give notice to her family; but the clouds of dust raised by so many horses soon concealed her from their view, while the wind and the rapidity of their course carried away her words and stifled her cries.

The coach which rattled rapidly over the plain of St. Denis soon reached the forest of Livry. There the roads were so narrow that the horsemen were

compelled to divide themselves into two groups, one galloping in front, and the other following behind as close as possible.

When she saw both sides of the carriage free, it struck Madame de Miramion that by jumping out of the door on the thickest side of the wood, she might perhaps hide herself and be safe. She immediately followed up the idea, jumping into the midst of the brambles and thorns, and running through the bushes without thinking that she was tearing her clothes and scratching her face ; but seeing that her ravishers had perceived her escape and were already in hot pursuit, and fearful lest they should place her on horseback in order to carry her off more easily, she sprang back into the carriage again with as much agility as she had left it.

In the most lonely part of the forest a halt was made, and the men of the escort partook in haste of some refreshment, which was likewise offered to the persons in the coach. But it was in vain they insisted on Madame de Miramion's following their example ; she declared that nothing would induce her to accept of any food until she was set at liberty.

The conductors then changed horses and forced Madame de Miramion's mother-in-law, her companion and the equerry, to get out of the coach, declaring they would only keep Mademoiselle Gabrielle, the name of her lady's-maid.

The coach set off again suddenly, and the young widow remained alone with her lady's-maid, and her faithful footman, whom nothing could induce to leave her, mounted behind. They found four relays of six

horses each prepared, on the road. In passing through the villages Madame de Miramion redoubled her cries and screams for help, and as she had succeeded in cutting the leather curtains of the coach with a pocket-knife, she threw out money to all she met; but the gentlemen on horseback said she was a poor maniac whom they were going to place in confinement by the orders of the Court; and the state in which she was, with her hair all dishevelled, no handkerchief on her neck, without her bonnet, her clothes torn, and her hands and face bleeding, rendered their story the more probable.

They arrived towards evening at the château de Launay, a feudal fortress situated three leagues from Sens, which belonged to the Grand Prior of France, Hugh de Bussy-Rabutin, that debauched and immoral man whom Madame de Sévigné called, "my uncle, the corsair." This castle, which had been an ancient monastery of the Templars, still presented an imposing mass of fortifications, and was surrounded on every side with a moat as wide as it was deep. To enter it, it was necessary to cross several drawbridges, which were let down one after the other with a great clanking of iron chains, and were immediately raised again. "Nothing," says the Abbé de Choisy, "could be more like a prison."

The noise of these chains and bridges, the chill and doleful echoes awakened by the carriage rolling over the moat and under the dark vaults of the towers which led to the inner court, the great number of gentlemen she saw assembled there, and the night, which was fast coming on, all contributed to increase the

terror which had already seized upon poor Madame de Miramion.

She was completely ignorant of the names and intentions of those who had dared to use such violence towards her. The precautions they had taken to separate her from her mother-in-law, the little effect that her prayers and supplications, her tears and menaces, had produced upon them, made her look on them as ferocious and inexorable men, capable of any atrocity.

Therefore, when the coach entered the yard, and she saw the horses taken away, Madame de Miramion declared that she would not get out of the carriage, and that she was resolved to pass the night in it.

A Knight of Malta came to the carriage door, unmasked, and begged in the most respectful terms that she would be good enough to get out of her coach and enter the castle.

Madame de Miramion, without moving from her place, asked him in a firm voice, if it was he who had carried her off.

"No, madame," he replied, respectfully, "it is the Comte de Bussy-Rabutin, Lieutenant-General and Colonel of Cavalry, who assured us all that he carried you off with your free consent, and only to compel your family to sanction your marriage."

"What he has told you is false," she cried, "and you will see if I will consent."

"Madame," replied the Knight of Malta, "we are two hundred gentlemen here, all relations or friends of the Comte de Bussy. But if he has deceived us we will assist you, madame, against him, and set you

at liberty. We will make him listen to reason; only get out of the carriage, trusting to my word of honour, and take some rest in the castle."

The chevalier appeared so noble, gentle, and honest, that Madame de Miramion felt confidence in him. However, she would not go up-stairs into the apartments prepared for her, as he wished her to do, but only consented to go into a low and damp hall which opened into the court-yard.

A fire was lighted, and as there were no seats, she made her footman bring her the carriage-cushions to sit upon. Two pistols lay on the table; she immediately took possession of them, and having ascertained that they were loaded, she placed them beside her, determined to defend herself, if necessary, to the utmost. Her lady's-maid wished to leave her for a moment.

"No," she said, imperiously, "stay here, you shall not leave me."

Food was brought her, but she pushed aside the dishes without tasting them, refusing with the utmost haughtiness to touch food, saying she would either die or have her liberty.

Several persons of distinction then came to her one after the other, some to threaten her with all sorts of violence, others to offer her honourable terms; but all of them trying to induce her to consent to marry the Comte de Bussy.

As for him, he had not yet shown himself; wishing to avoid the first explosion of an indignation which he hoped to overcome, if he kept out of the way. He was exceedingly surprised to find her so firm, coura-

geous, and steadfast in her resolution, for he had often been assured that the young widow was so gentle and timid that she would soon consent to anything; "but," he wrote, "I was told she was a lamb, and I find her to be a furious lioness." However, as he was confident of his own powers of pleasing, he did not yet despair of bringing her to listen to him, and thought it wiser to prepare the way for an amicable interview by the person most likely to influence her.

Accordingly, the Knight of Malta, who had first spoken to Madame de Miramion, was again sent to her, and assured her by all that was sacred that the intentions of the Comte de Bussy were perfectly honourable, and that if she would consent to marry him she would always find him the tenderest and most devoted of husbands. He praised M. de Bussy, his character and intelligence, and did not forget to make the most of his rank, his position at Court, as also the friendship borne to him by the Prince de Condé. He added that Bussy was exceedingly distressed at the erroneous opinion he had formed of her, through the fault of a third party, and would set her at liberty at once; but before doing so he requested she would grant him the favour of listening to him for one moment.

Almost immediately Bussy himself appeared, accompanied by the most important persons of his escort; but though a successful courtier, and a man of courage and intelligence, he was utterly intimidated at the sight of this noble woman, full of dignity and courage, in spite of her painful position; and he could only fall on his knees before her, at the entrance of the

hall, imploring her, with clasped hands, to listen to and forgive him.

"I swear," she cried, when she saw him, "I swear before the living God, my Creator and yours, that I will never be your wife."

The effort she made in pronouncing these words, exhausted her little remaining strength, and she fell back almost fainting on her cushions.

A medical man that M. de Bussy had had the precaution to send for from Sens, felt her pulse, and finding it almost without movement, declared her to be in imminent danger. More than forty hours had passed since she had taken food, and this long abstinence, joined to such various and painful emotions, had completely exhausted her strength.

The fear of the consequences (for had she died he would have had to answer for it before the tribunals), and the news which arrived from the town of Sens, informing him that six hundred men-at-arms were starting to besiege the château of Launay to rescue her, as well as the heroic firmness shown by Madame de Miramion herself, determined M. de Bussy at last to give up his project and to set her at liberty. He assured her of it himself, and even confirmed it by an oath in order to induce her to take some nourishment.

"When the horses are put to my coach, and I shall have got into it, I will eat," she replied, in a voice which hope rendered more firm.

When the horses were put to she got in with her servants, and then, without requiring any further pressing, she accepted two fresh eggs, but nothing

more, for fear that narcotics should have been mixed with other food. The coach immediately drove out of the yard, escorted by the Knight of Malta, who had inspired Madame de Miramion with real confidence, and two other gentlemen, who were indignant at the snare which had been laid for her.

This knight, whose name the Abbé de Choisy regretted not knowing, was Guy de Rabutin, brother of the Comte de Bussy, who died at the Temple, at Paris, in the house of his uncle the Grand Prior, a year after this event.

He placed himself at the carriage door, and during the journey he employed all his eloquence to excuse his brother in Madame de Miramion's eyes, assuring her that he had been deceived himself by the confessor who directed her; that this monk had declared to them that she would not be at all sorry to be run away with, in order to avoid a marriage that her family wished her to contract with a gentleman of the long robe. He added that Bussy was quite distressed at his mistake and the consequences it might draw upon him; that Father Clement alone was guilty, and implored her to pardon Bussy, who was innocent.

These explanations, which made known to Madame de Miramion the foul intrigue of Father Clement, whom she had formerly had as a confessor, somewhat calmed her indignation against Bussy. But she could not forgive him, because, thinking himself powerful, he had tried to force her to marry him, solely that he might become master of her immense fortune; so, in spite of the supplications of the Chevalier, she kept silence and would make no promise. The escort, who

feared to be arrested by the officers of justice at Sens, stopped on arriving at a short distance from the outskirts of the town.

The coachman and the postilion took away the horses, the Knight of Malta and the gentlemen of the escort bowed most respectfully to Madame de Miramion, and masters, servants, and horses fled back at full speed to the castle of Launay.

Left alone upon the road with her lady's-maid and her footman, Madame de Miramion got out of her carriage, and with great difficulty reached the suburbs of the town on foot. When she arrived it was the middle of the night and the gates of the town were shut, but as she could no longer stand on her feet she took refuge in the nearest inn. There they told her that the town was up in arms by order of the Queen Regent to go to the assistance of the widow of a counsellor of Parliament who had been carried off by force by a nobleman of rank. "Alas," she said, "it is I!" and worn out with fatigue she went to lie down.

The news of her arrival had soon spread in the town, and her brother, M. de Rubelle, and her cousin, the Abbé de Marsilly, hastened to come and find her. On seeing them her joy was so great that she fainted away.

As soon as she had recovered her senses her first thought was for Madame de Miramion, her mother-in-law, whom Bussy had so cruelly abandoned, with the old equerry and her maid, in the middle of the forest of Livry. The Abbé de Marsilly told her that she had not lost her time; she had begun by walking rapidly to the nearest village, from whence she had sent the

old equerry on horseback to Paris to inform the family of the incredible event which had taken place, and ask for assistance. Then she procured plough-horses, which had dragged her to Paris, where she learned on her arrival that in consequence of her message a number of horsemen, with M. de Rubelle at their head, had already started in the direction of Sens.

Indeed, they had arrived in this town half an hour before Madame de Miramion had reached the little inn in the suburbs. After having taken the necessary care of his sister, M. de Rubelle, who was exceedingly angry and determined to revenge her honour, started with the Provost of Sens at the head of a numerous troop of armed men to go and besiege the château of Launay, and lay hold of the Comte de Bussy. But when they arrived there, Bussy and his accomplices had left it and escaped.

On returning to Sens M. de Rubelle found his sister dangerously ill. The shock produced by this event had been too great for her. She had hardly got into bed before a violent fever came on, accompanied with delirium. When she became a little better, her brother, who was doubly uneasy at seeing her so ill in a town entirely without resources, had her carried to Paris in a litter in order to have further medical assistance. The journey increased the danger; remedies of every kind were tried in vain, and the last sacraments were administered to her, for all the doctors despaired of her life. However, after a time she got well, though her recovery was slow and painful, and it required all her courage to face a future so full of danger and difficulty.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMTE DE BUSSY-RABUTIN.

1648.

"A good heart is a quality which will always be preferred to brilliant wit in civilized society."—*Saint-Evremond.*

I.

THE person who had attempted this audacious *coup de main*, Roger de Rabutin, Comte de Bussy, whose "*Histoire des Gaules*," and the long disgrace into which it brought him, his Letters and his Memoirs, but above all the immortal correspondence of his clever cousin, Madame de Sévigné, have since made known to the world, was then only an ordinary nobleman at the Court of Anne of Austria. However, he had already fought bravely at Rocroy, Fribourg, and Nordlingen, under the eye of the Prince of Condé, and came back to Saint-Germain lieutenant-general, and colonel of the cavalry; with a light purse, it is true, but full of confidence in the brilliant future that his birth, intelligence, and courage could not fail to obtain for him. Proud of

the ancient nobility of his family, which dated at least from the twelfth century, he was vain enough to venture to say : " I give place to Montmorency as far as honour is concerned, but not even to him for ancient birth." He descended, in fact (as did also Madame de Sévigné), from that Christopher de Rabutin whose rooms in the château of Bourbilly were all hung with his escutcheon, and who (says his biographer), "after having put his arms in a thousand places, and in a thousand different ways, afterwards had a coat made of them." It is well known that all these old Rabutins were proud of their birth, were brave and clever, somewhat original, and with a kind of caustic humour, of which Bussy had only inherited too great a share. But, singular destiny ! of all this proud race of warriors, the only member of the family whose memory has really survived, is that of a clever woman who wrote letters to her daughter.

Roger de Rabutin, son of the Baron Léonar de Bussy-Rabutin and of Diane de Cugnac, entered the military career, like his ancestors, at sixteen. Four years afterwards his father gave in his resignation, and obtained a regiment for his son. He had taken part in four campaigns and had became a colonel when his parents, whose fortune was much impaired, pressed him to look out for some rich heiress as a wife, giving him several examples of persons who by their good looks and attractive manners had made rich marriages.

Without believing word for word all that Bussy says to his own advantage, it must be acknowledged that he had the most fascinating qualities, which no modesty

precluded him from making the most of with women. He was lively in conversation, enterprising, witty, and courageous. As to his person, it has been handed down to us in a portrait in which the brilliant colours are not obscured by dark shadows, as in that of Madame de Sévigné. His eyes were fine, with a sweet expression, his mouth well formed, his nose large and somewhat aquiline, a rounded forehead, a frank expression and an agreeable physiognomy, with a profusion of fine fair light hair. He spoke well, and wrote correctly, and with elegance.

The first heiress on whom his father urged him to make an attempt, was naturally his cousin Marie de Rabutin de Chantal, who was an orphan, and whose marriage portion of a hundred thousand crowns* would have very well suited his impoverished finances. But the Abbé de Coulanges, the young lady's uncle and guardian, had too much good sense to confide the happiness of his dear ward into such hands, and considered it wiser to keep her for the Marquis de Sévigné.

Irritated by this refusal, Bussy afterwards pretended that he had been startled by the giddy manner of Mademoiselle de Chantal, "which made him look upon her as the most charming girl in the world to be another man's wife, but not one's own." But these unworthy detractions on the part of the Marquis de Bussy, are all the more doubtful as no one ever loved and praised Madame de Sévigné more than he did

* Which is worth about seven hundred thousand francs of our time, the *mare d'argent* being equal to twenty-six pounds ten sous.

afterwards. No one ever had more admiration for her wit, or a more profound esteem for her virtue. It is therefore more natural to attribute these words to a feeling of spite and disappointment, which no doubt also induced him to marry the same year (1643) another of his cousins, Mademoiselle Gabrielle de Toulongeon, who was, like Madame de Sévigné, granddaughter of Sainte Chantal. By this marriage, which was not a happy one, he had three daughters; but on his return from the siege of Courtray (which he has related in verse, and which was the most brilliant period of his military career) he lost his wife, who died on the 20th December, 1646. "She was very fond of me," he says in his Memoirs, "and I was exceedingly afflicted at her loss."

However extreme may have been M. de Bussy's grief, he soon consoled himself; for a year had hardly passed before he began to seek for another alliance wherewith to repair his ruined fortunes.

"What I wished for," he says, "was one of those marriages where a rich widow becomes infatuated with a handsome fellow; one, in fact, who would have accepted me without asking any questions." It was in the midst of these disinterested reflections, that he planned the audacious attempt we have related in our last chapter, and which has so justly contributed to sully the reputation of the Comte de Bussy.

But not wishing him to be judged without being heard, we will allow him to relate in his turn what he calls his "imprudent undertaking."

II.

"TOWARDS the end of the winter 1647," he says, in his Memoirs, "an old citizen of Paris, named Le Bocage, a country neighbour of my uncle the Grand Prior of France, came to propose a marriage to me, with a widow who had, he said, a fortune of four hundred thousand crowns,* and added that he was the intimate friend of a reverend Father of Mercy, her confessor, and likewise her Director. I, who was seeking for a fortune because I knew it served more than merit to obtain honour, was ready to believe all he told me. . . . Le Bocage introduced me to the confessor, who promised me his assistance, and he let us see each other twice in the church of Le Merci, but without being introduced, to know if we were mutually pleased with each other. He afterwards told me she did not dislike me, but that she did not dare to act in the affair without the consent of her relations, who particularly desired she should marry a gentleman of the robe. He added, however, that if I would let him act, he would take steps to induce the principal relations to accept me; and that in any case he would persuade her to decide for herself. As the campaign was just beginning, he advised me to join the army, and said that he would let me know all that went on.

"I started therefore, and went to Péronne on the 6th of May, 1648. . . . On the 24th of the same month, at the siege of Courtray, I received a letter from the confessor of Madame de Miramion (who was the widow

* About two million eight hundred thousand francs.

in question), by which he informed me, under feigned names, that the lady had not the courage to resist her relations, who were opposed to our union, but that she would be very glad if I would aid her, by an appearance of violence, to say 'yes.' I understood that she desired me to carry her off by force, and this advice surprised me exceedingly; nevertheless, coming from a pious monk who did not appear to have any other interest in the affair than the advantage and satisfaction of both parties, I did not hesitate to follow it; besides, I was willing enough to believe a story which tallied so completely with my own wishes.

"I communicated my design to the Prince of Condé, who approved of it when he had seen the letter of the Father of Mercy; and promised to give me the news of the capitulation of Ypres to carry to the court, in order that I might return to Paris without allowing my plans to be suspected; he even offered me Bellegarde, one of his strongholds in Burgundy, as a place of retirement after the abduction; but this I declined with thanks, not thinking I should require to carry off the lady further than Launay, which was one of the castles of the Grand Prior of France, situated between Sens and Bray-sur-Seine. On the 25th of May, I answered the confessor's letter, and said that I should soon be at Paris, when I would do anything he thought fit. On the 27th the town of Ypres capitulated, and the prince sent me as bearer of the news to the court, where I arrived on the morning of the 30th. As soon as I had finished my business there, I went to Madame de Miramion's confessor, who appeared to be still of the same opinion as when he wrote to me about the

abduction. I then prepared four relays of horses between Saint Cloud (where I was to surprise my 'Helen' on her road to Mont Valérien) and Launay.

"I had with me my brother, Guy de Rabutin de Gillier; a gentleman who was my friend, and who had served with me in two campaigns; three of my equerries; M. le Lonzat, de Fradel, a relation of my own, with Le Plessis and Saint Félix, two brave fellows who were perfectly devoted to me. I met the widow in her mother-in-law's coach, near the garden of Mademoiselle du Tillet, at Saint Cloud. I forced the coachman to turn back over the bridge, and to go into the Bois de Boulogne, where the first relay was waiting, and where I wanted the widow to change carriages, but I could not induce her to do so. I therefore only took out her two horses and put six of mine in their place; and then, all of us being on horseback, on each side of the coach, we crossed the plain of Saint Denis, and entered the forest of Livry.

"As the lady screamed as loud as she could, and I thought it was the presence of her mother-in-law which obliged her to do so, I made the mother-in-law get out in the middle of the wood, and only left a maid in the carriage with the widow, and a footman behind; but the lady made as much noise as before, which made me see that I had been deceived.

"I wanted to send her back, but my brother-in-law dissuaded me from doing so, saying that she would perhaps change her mind, and that in any case I could send her back more honourably from Launay than from the country, as it would be said she had been taken from me by force. I agreed with him,

and when we arrived at Launay, seeing that the lady still continued her lamentations, I told her that if I had not believed she was a consenting party to what I had done, I should not have attempted it; that I implored her to believe she was free to do anything she chose, and that I would not force her in anything for all the world. She said that if I would give her her liberty she would make a good use of it. I replied that I thought that if she ever left me, she would never come back again, but that it was not in my way to force a lady to do anything. I assured her again that it was with the belief that she would not be displeased at my running away with her, that I had done so; that if she thought me sufficiently a man of honour to deserve her, she had only to say so, and I would live with her in such a manner as never to make her repent the favour she had done me; but that if she wished to go away, she was free to do so, and I would immediately have her conducted back to Sens. She begged me to do so, giving me to understand that I should succeed much better in that way than in the one I had employed. I told her I did not reckon upon it; but that I should ever remain her devoted servant. I gave a hundred pistoles to the maid for her lady's expenses, and I had her escorted by three of my gentlemen from Launay to Sens.

"The magistrates, informed of the arrival of the lady in their town, went to her, and received her declaration, which she made as much as possible in my favour. However, when she arrived at Paris, her relations persuaded her that her honour compelled her to prosecute me, and they obliged her to do it. I

therefore sent a gentleman express to the Prince of Condé, to whom I wrote the following letter:

"MONSEIGNEUR,

"My affair has not had the success which I hoped for. This gentleman will give your highness all the details; however, I assure you that one of the things which pains me the most in not having succeeded is, to have failed in obtaining an establishment which would have permitted me to serve your highness better than I can do without it. For as to my personal interest, Monseigneur, I should be quite consoled by receiving marks of the continuance of your gracious favour and protection. At this moment I stand in need of them, Monseigneur, for the lady's relations prosecute me fiercely in her name. A line written by your highness to her uncle, M. Bonneau, would, I think, put a stop to all proceedings. I beseech you most humbly to grant me this favour, in order that I may be sooner at liberty to return to you, and endeavour to merit the quality of" etc. . . . etc. . . . etc. . . .

"My messenger arrived on the 20th August, 1648. The prince was on the battle-field of Sens, which he had just gained: As soon as he had read my letter, and that he had learned from my courier the details of the affair, he wrote to M. Bonneau in the tone, not only of a prince of royal blood, but also a victorious general, so that this letter imposed silence on all parties.

"All my friends in the army, not having the time to write to me, complimented me on my adventure.

"On the 8th September, I went to Calais. I found the prince there; he had got a musket-wound in the back, which he had received at the siege of Furne. As I entered his room he began to laugh, and sing—

"'O la folle entreprise
Du prince de Condé!'

which was an old song, formerly written upon his father; and then he made me give him the details of my adventure.

"The prince left for the Court, and I accompanied him. The king, who had retired to Saint-Germain, had resolved to chastise Paris, but, however, the affair was made up.

"About that time the prince begged my friend Champlatreux, son of the First President Molé, to arrange my affair with the relations of Madame de Miramion, who asked for heavy damages for her expenses in prosecuting me; and while this was being settled I did not stay long at Paris, for fear of confirming the ridiculous suspicions which had been put into the lady's head, that I intended to carry her off again. I therefore went home, where I should have remained much longer, had I not received a letter from my mother from Paris, insisting on my returning there at once, as every means were being taken to arrange the affair; however, I did not find matters so advanced as I expected.

"I amused myself with my friends while the negociations were pending. However, the year 1648 passed away without anything being settled; and on the Eve of the Epiphany, 1649, the Court left the Palais-Royal by night, and retired to Saint Germain.

"As for myself, I lodged at the Temple with my uncle the Grand Prior of France, and I knew nothing of the king's departure till the following day, when the gates were watched, and it was almost impossible to get away. However, I found means to pass at the Porte Saint Martin, and fortunate it was I did so, as

had my adversaries discovered me at Paris, they would have been capable of serving me some bad turn, as they then had very little respect for the prince. I joined him at Saint Germain, and he desired me to go and fetch his company of light cavalry in Burgundy. I started immediately, and had resolved to set fire to Rubelle, which was a castle near Melun, belonging to Madame de Miramion, who, in spite of her promises to the Prince de Condé, had again begun to prosecute me since I left Paris. However, when I arrived at Rubelle, I changed my mind, though in revenging myself on my persecutors, I should have gained favour with the Court, who at that moment considered as praiseworthy any injury done to members of Parliament; but I did not care to do it. On the contrary, I placed a guard of the prince's in the château, whom I forbad to take anything from the owner or from its inhabitants, undertaking to reward them myself. This conduct ought to have touched the lady's heart, or at least prevented her from continuing the prosecution; but not at all . . . . When peace was made between the Court and the Parliament, she again began to prosecute me; and it was Champlatreux who, by his credit and energy, backed up by the prince's authority, got me out of the affair, for which I had to give four thousand pounds, besides more than a thousand which it had already cost me. It is superfluous for me to say that this *undertaking was imprudent.* When I undertook to relate it, I expected to be blamed for it; but this I did not fear—I am more afraid of telling a lie than of being blamed."

Whatever M. le Comte de Bussy may say on the

subject, the truth is that he cared as little for telling falsehoods as for being blamed; and the long exile in which he passed his life, as well as the unanimously unfavourable opinion entertained of him by his contemporaries, are proofs too evident to be disputed.

Among the opinions expressed of his character, we will only quote that of Saint-Evremond, because he knew him intimately:—

"What are we to believe of M. le Comte de Bussy," he says in his works, "except what all the world already thinks of him? He is a man of high birth, with abundance of wit and talent, and I have known him in a position which justified him in the hope of attaining a large fortune, in doing which many who were his inferiors had succeeded.

"But he preferred the pleasure of writing a bad book and making himself the laughing-stock of the world. He wished to make a merit of his liberty by pretending to speak frankly and openly of every one, and could not sustain this character to the end.

"After more than twenty years of exile he came back to Court in a state of humiliation, having neither position, employment, nor consideration.

"When a man has lost his fortune by his own fault, and when he has deliberately chosen to do what M. de Bussy did, he ought to pass the rest of his life in retirement, and at least sustain with dignity the unfortunate character he has so unadvisedly assumed.

"He was besides exceedingly fond of slander; his best friends, the courtiers, and even the King himself,

were not exempt from the sharp strokes of his evil tongue. He cared for no one, and at last succeeded in making himself disliked by every one. Few, therefore, took notice of his disgrace, and it is said that fewer still interested themselves in his return to Court. A good heart is a quality which will always be preferred to brilliant wit in civilized society."

This, then, was the abductor of Madame de Miramion, and thus it was that the paid falsehood of an unprincipled monk and the dubious folly of an ambitious nobleman brought together for a few moments two persons most unlike each other, and most dissimilar in habits and manners.

A short time afterwards, faithful to his habits of levity and gallantry, M. de Bussy, wishing to forget his failure as quickly as possible, hastened to join his amiable cousin, who was with her husband, M. de Sévigné, at the abbey of Verrières, the house of Monseigneur de Neuchèze, Bishop of Châlons, who was uncle to them both. There he was already turning his leisure to his own advantage by insinuating himself into the good graces of the young wife, when he was suddenly recalled to Paris to answer for his conduct to the aggrieved family of Madame de Miramion, which annoyed him extremely. But two days after his arrival, his wit and gaiety had gained the upper hand, for he wrote jestingly to M. and Madame de Sévigné:

"Since I left you, my dear friends, I can hardly eat at all. You who have a high opinion of your merits will not fail to believe that it is my regret for your absence which has given me this aversion for food, but that is

not at all the reason—the soups of Maître Crochet* have disgusted me with all others."

And it is with this note that began with Madame de Sévigné that interchange of letters to which Bussy owes his descent to posterity.

During his stay at Paris his friends, although they made him offers of service, with many expressions of condolence, did not neglect — French fashion — to lampoon him, and whenever he appeared they began to hum,—

Pour aller à la potence,
Il faut enlever quelqu'un,
Ou souffleter d'importance,
Un conseiller du commun.
Il faut avoir ce dit-on,
Miramion ou Boislève
Boislève ou Miramion.†

But at length, as with French people everything finishes by being put into rhyme, Bussy made up his mind to make a ballad on himself, and on the 15th of September, 1649, being at Clermont in Beauvoisis, with his friend and accomplice De Gillier, he wrote this complaint to a lady,—

Deux pauvres chevaliers errants,
Et par monts et par vaux courants,
Tantôt pour enlever des dames,
Maintenant pour tirer leurs lames,
Prennent une heure de loisir

* The Bishop of Châlons' cook. Letter from Bussy-Rabutin, 15th November, 1668.

† An allusion to the Counsellor Boislève, who had his ears boxed by M. de Marigny.

Pour vous écrire le désir
Qu'ils ont de retourner bien vite
A Paris, dans le Temple, au gîte.

M. de Bussy, who, as the Duke of Saint-Simon has said, "was as well known for vanity as for hardness of heart," took care, as may be supposed, to speak of his ridiculous attempt in an ambiguous manner in order to justify it. It is this which explains how Madame de Sévigné and the greater part of the authors of the period only knew and spoke of the affair in a vague and inexact manner. The beauty and virtue of Madame de Miramion were besides quite unknown to the world, and especially to the Court, where she had never made her appearance.

This abduction made very little noise, and was soon forgotten in the turmoil of political events by which France was then agitated.

Barricades had been erected the very day that Madame de Miramion came back to Paris dangerously ill. The disturbances went on increasing, and at last the Court, in order to escape from the murmurs of the Parliamentary Fronde as well as from the cries and songs of the people, had been obliged to withdraw to Saint Germain. The Parisian troops, who were constantly defeated by Condé, revenged themselves by epigrams, and consoled themselves by the most licentious revelry. A sort of fever of pleasure and liberty reigned in the two camps, and at length the licence became so unbounded that one night the principal officers of the Fronde having met in the street the blessed Sacrament, which was being carried to a dying man (whom they suspected to be Mazarin), recon-

ducted It and the priests with blows from the flat of their swords. What interest could the abduction of a widow excite after such an act of sacrilege?

Besides, it must be owned that an abduction in the seventeenth century, when its object was a marriage, was exceedingly common, and in no wise looked upon as disgraceful. The Prince of Condé had already lent his aid to his friend the Duc de Chastillon to carry off Mademoiselle de Montmorency-Boutteville, and thus oblige her parents to marry the two fugitives, and people only laughed about it.

Later, when Louis XIV. became absolute master of the kingdom, an abduction was no longer thought of so lightly, for the daughter of the Comte de Créance, after having voluntarily lived fourteen years with the Marquis de Pomenars, attacked him before the Courts for rape. "Pomenars has just left my room," says Madame de Sévigné: "we have talked over his affairs very seriously; in fact, his head is at stake. The Comte de Créance insists on his having it cut off; Pomenars will not consent to it—this is the gist of the whole affair."

But in 1648, in the midst of the licentious days of the Fronde, every one was occupied with the hopes or fears which the uncertain issue of this strange civil war brought forth, and private quarrels or outrages were lost sight of in the face of such startling public calamities.

CHAPTER V.

MADAME DE MIRAMION RESOLVES TO REMAIN A WIDOW.

1648—1649.

"I will endeavour to possess my soul in peace, in order that my soul may possess God."—*Madame de Miramion.*

I.

"AFTER my return from my abduction," says Madame de Miramion (in the account she gave of her life to her confessor, written with that modesty and reserve with which she always spoke of herself), "I was sick unto death, and received extreme unction. However, God allowed me to recover.

"I prosecuted M. de Bussy for two years, and then I forgave him for the love of God."*

But she had already forgiven him, even before she prosecuted him; for we know by M. de Bussy himself, who relates it in his Memoirs, that if an enquiry

* This narrative is in the Appendix, among the writings of Madame de Miramion.

was made upon the subject, it was at the request of M. de Rubelle, and quite against her wishes.

She always refused to take an oath when she gave evidence, and so far as she could, without being untruthful, she did it favourably towards the culprit.

Several times she begged her family to pardon the Comte, as she had done; but they were all the less disposed to consent to her wishes, as since this attempt she was more than ever disinclined to listen to any proposal of marriage.

However, as soon as the Prince de Condé had written to Madame de Miramion's relations a polite but urgent letter in which he asked their forgiveness for Bussy, they showed consideration for the entreaties of the hero who by the victory of Sens had once again saved France; and the proceedings were suspended. But when Condé and Bussy, both of whom were on the side of the Court, made war against the Parliament and the Fronde, the families Bonneau and Miramion, both of them parliamentary by blood and affection, again commenced hostilities, and only ceased when they heard from their mutual friend, M. Malé de Champlatreux, of the generous protection that Bussy had afforded, in this war of retaliation, to the château de Rubelle, a large estate that Madame de Miramion possessed near Melun, and which it had been proposed to set on fire.

This noble conduct immediately calmed all animosity, and put an end to the prosecution, but on one condition only, which M. de Bussy, it is true, did not think necessary to mention in his Memoirs, and this was that he should promise never again to appear in

Madame de Miramion's presence. "Though this promise was humiliating, yet he made it," says Choisy, "and abided by it."

Thus finished this audacious adventure, which we have related in all its details, because it appeared to us to give an exact idea of the character and habits of a period about which people at present are often curious.

For M. de Bussy it was no doubt only one of the many episodes in his life of gallantry; but it was to have a decided influence on the future of the lady who had been its victim.

Restored to life but not to health, after the dangerous illness which it had occasioned, Madame de Miramion was obliged to remain for several months confined to her room.

But during these long hours of suffering, her mind, which was always active and united with God, acquired a firmness and a constancy in which it had until then been wanting; and she formed certain resolutions to which she ever after adhered.

It is often thus, when some unforeseen event suddenly interrupts the course of our lives. The soul, stunned by the blow, seems at first to hesitate; but then it decides on its course, and the transformation we experience insensibly acts upon all around us. The world appears to us under a fresh aspect, and all our illusions vanish.

In seasons like these we examine anew our ideas, our opinions, and even our affections. We tax our memory as to the past, which now appears to us in a new light.

It would seem that, our old life being fairly over, before beginning a new one and rushing into an uncertain future, we feel the necessity of examining the ground to which we have been transplanted, and the dangers which may meet us in the new career which fate or rather Providence has reserved for us.

This necessity often awakens in us a strength of resolution of which we were not aware; our very nature seems changed. Persons under such circumstances have been known to acquire all of a sudden, as if by a supernatural gift, the qualities and virtues necessary to their new life. These wonderful and happy metamorphoses are perhaps more frequent in women than in men. However timid a woman may be by nature, it often happens that she surprises those who know her by an energy and a presence of mind which enable her to meet any emergency, especially when animated by any deep feeling or conviction.

Such was the transformation wrought in Madame de Miramion by her great sorrow.

She examined her own heart closely, and, finding that the love of her husband still reigned there in all its intensity, she resolved to give up all idea of a second marriage, and to devote the remainder of her life only to God and to her daughter.

Indeed, God only could heal and fill a heart like hers which had loved Him from the first, and which had been so cruelly tried in its earthly affections. She felt herself incapable of any fresh love which should efface the image of M. de Miramion, and with a tender veneration to his memory, resolved henceforth to live for God alone.

Considering all that had taken place as a dispensation of Providence her hesitation and her weakness ceased at once, and the resolution not to marry again, which she had not yet dared to announce to her family, became irrevocably fixed in her mind.

Her health was hardly re-established than it began to be rumoured that M. de Bussy, ashamed of his first failure, intended again to try and carry her off. Madame de Miramion took advantage of this rumour to beg her family to allow her to retire for a little time to the convent of Sainte Marie.

Nothing was then more usual among ladies in the world than these spiritual retreats in some religious house; and the convent of the nuns of the Visitation of Sainte Marie in the Rue Saint Antoine was preferred for that purpose by the ladies of the Court.

It was in the cloisters of this convent that, not long before, the virtuous Madame Lafayette had buried for ever that beauty, youth, and purity which had made her so tenderly beloved by Louis XIII. It was at the grating of her modest parlour that this weak but unfortunate king had passed long hours with the humble nun, imploring her to ask God to cure him of a love he could never forget.

The family of Madame de Miramion, in the midst of the troubles which the Fronde excited at Paris, really feared some fresh outrage on the part of Bussy, and so readily consented that she should seek shelter for some months in the sanctuary of Sainte Marie.

After having taken leave of her child, whom she confided to the devoted care of her mother-in-law, Madame de Miramion joyfully hastened to shut her-

self up in the convent, where perfect peace and holy austerity filled all the cravings of her heart.

What soul wearied with the vanities of this world, what heart sinking under the weight of heavy grief, does not envy the silence and the calm of these holy retreats, where the noise and cares of earth no longer intrude?

II.

THE Order of the Visitation, founded by St. François de Sales at Annecy in 1610, under the superintendence of Madame de Chantal (Madame de Sévigné's grandmother), had only been established by her at Paris, in the year 1625. It was therefore somewhat new, and the pious ladies of whom it was composed were still full of the spirit of their holy founders, that is to say of that fervent zeal and charity which captivated all hearts. Besides, the house they occupied in the Rue Saint Antoine had received, a few years before, the last visit of the reverend mother de Chantal, "and everything in its walls still preserved, as it were, the perfume of the presence and of the virtues of this holy lady."*

Everything in the religious life charmed Madame de Miramion; even its austerities and its humiliations. The singing of the divine office above all delighted

* Madame de Chantal, at the request of Anne of Austria, came to spend some weeks of the month of November, 1641, at Paris, and it was on her return to Annecy that she fell ill and died at Moulins, on the 13th of December of the same year.—*Life of Sainte Chantal, by Madame de Coligny.*

her. It is true that she had been taught Latin, because it was the language of the Church, and she could therefore appreciate all the beauties of our liturgy.

Every day she followed with the most scrupulous exactitude the exercises of the community, and the time she did not spend in prayer, she generally passed in reading and meditation. The Gospel and the Life of the Saints were familiar to her. But among the edifying lives she liked to read, and which she took as her example, none drew her so irresistibly towards the religious life as that of the reverend mother de Chantal. She found in it such close analogies with her own troubles and aspirations, that it affected her strongly, and made her desire to imitate her in everything.

The life of Madame de Chantal indeed offers many points of resemblance with that of Madame de Miramion, and served as her example in the course she afterwards followed. On this account we will give a rapid sketch of it here.

Françoise Frémiot, daughter of the President of the Parliament of Dijon, and sister of the Archbishop of Bourges, was from her childhood a model of piety. Having lost her mother early, she concentrated all her affection upon her father, who, after having brought her up with the greatest care, married her at twenty years of age to Messire Christophe de Rabutin, Baron de Chantal. Just as she was beginning to taste all that happiness which mutual affection and esteem alone can give, her husband died suddenly, having been mortally wounded by an imprudent friend while out shoot-

ing. On hearing of the accident, Madame de Chantal, wild with grief, rushed to the spot where her husband lay dying, and kneeling by him she clasped him in her arms, exclaiming, "Lord! take all I have in the world, but leave me the husband Thou gavest me!"

M. de Chantal, with that sublime tranquillity and manly resignation which faith alone can give to the dying, said to her, "Heaven's decree is just, my Françoise; we must accept it and die."

"No, no; you must live," she cried again.

"Ah, dear wife," he murmured, "let us cheerfully submit our will to the will of God;" and he expired, freely pardoning him who had been the cause of his death.

A widow at eight-and-twenty, Madame de Chantal immediately distributed her richest clothes to the poor, and lived in strict seclusion, determined to devote her life henceforth to God and her children.

Some years afterwards she had the happiness of hearing St. François de Sales, the celebrated Bishop of Geneva, preach at Dijon, and afterwards met him at her father's house. M. de Chantal, like Henri IV., Richelieu, St. Vincent de Paul, and all those who had the advantage of seeing and hearing the holy prelate, was deeply touched with that wonderful gentleness which God had diffused over his whole being, and "which made it impossible to see him," says the Baron de Cusy, "without being filled with love and devotion." At her earnest entreaty he became her director, and under such an excellent master she made rapid progress towards perfection.

When her eldest daughter had married, and the two

others had become nuns, her one idea was to consecrate herself entirely to God. Falling on her knees before her father, she implored him to allow her to become a nun, and begged that he would take charge of her son, who was then fifteen.

The old man, who felt that his daughter was obeying an irresistible vocation, replied, with tears, "Oh, my God, I have no right to oppose what Thou hast ordained, but it will be the death of me! O Lord! I offer Thee my dear daughter; take her, and console me!" After which, he gave her his blessing.

She was going to leave, when her son came and laid himself across the doorway, saying, "I am too weak, dearest mother, to keep you back; but it shall at least be said, that to abandon your only son, you had to step over his body."

Madame de Chantal, deeply grieved, wept bitterly for a long time; but then, summoning all her courage, she passed on, saying, "I leave my father and my son for ever; but I shall find God everywhere."

From that day forth, to serve, love, and glorify God, was the only desire of this saint, who, after her death, bequeathed to the world the "Order of the Visitation," the usefulness, fervour, and regularity of which has long edified the whole Church.

Inflamed by so noble an example, and charmed more and more with the peace she enjoyed in the cloister, Madame de Miramion, as she tells us herself in her *Confessions*, "was filled with the idea of being a nun, and even thought of becoming a Carmelite in some distant province where she was unknown."

But when, instead of a son of fifteen, her imagina-

tion pictured her little Marie lying across the doorway, stretching out her feeble hands towards her, her whole soul melted in maternal tenderness. She folded her arms upon her bosom as if she would have held there for ever the living souvenir of him she had so fondly loved. Before this frail but insurmountable barrier, all her projects of monastic life faded as a dream, and she felt that her first duty was to devote herself to this child, whose soul she must fortify, as well as her body, against the dangers and difficulties of life.

In the midst of these perplexities, Madame de Miramion sought the advice of the venerable and holy abbé Vincent de Paul, who, although seventy-three years of age, and weighed down by the care of the numerous good works he had created, was still the Director of the Convent of Sainte Marie. This worthy servant of God, of whom it might be said, as of his friend M. de Bérulle, "that the sight of him alone inspired piety," encouraged her in her determination to sanctify her widowhood by works of charity. But he dissuaded her from going into a convent, proposing another aim to her faith and devotedness, which, while it reconciled her religious inclinations with the duty she owed to her daughter, would make her life in the world as meritorious in the eyes of God, and at the same time more useful to others.

His wise advice became henceforward the rule of her life, and as a worthy daughter of St. Vincent de Paul, her natural inclinations were absorbed in the sublime flame of Christian charity. She had always been very benevolent, but after coming into contact with this heart, which was the focus of Divine charity, this

feeling greatly increased in her, and afterwards became the aim and passion of her life.

Her first act of self-denial when she returned home was to lay aside, as Sainte Chantal had done, her rich dresses, sumptuous furniture and equipages, and all that luxury which had before led her into such heavy and fruitless expenses. But this was not enough; she resolved to crucify her tastes in everything, and become the humble servant of the poor.

Three months had already passed away since her entrance into the Convent of Sainte Marie; three months which had passed calmly and rapidly as three happy days. It was the term she had herself fixed for this retreat. Therefore, when her brothers and M. de Choisy, who could not live without her, came to implore her to come back to them, she obeyed without hesitation. The desire to see her daughter, and the hope of being useful to her, made her eager to return home.

She left the convent accordingly, exceedingly regretted by all the community, to whom during three months she had been an object of unmixed admiration and respect. She gave to each some token of affection, and left a large donation to the convent as a proof of her gratitude and liberality.

But although she left this holy dwelling of her own free will, often did she turn her sorrowful gaze towards the altar from which she was compelled to tear herself away. Her vocation remained buried in her heart, and she learned to lead a hidden and inner life, which the world could neither disturb nor take away.

As soon as she returned to her family, her first care

was to occupy herself with the affairs of her daughter's property, in which she found an able assistant in her guardian, M. le Président de Ponchartrain,* M. de Miramion's first cousin. "He so appreciated, however," says Choisy, "the wisdom and mature judgment of this devoted mother, that he did not think it necessary to interfere much in her affairs, and allowed her to fulfil almost alone the arduous and important trust."

III.

MADAME DE MIRAMION was then only twenty, and the few years she had passed in retirement had in reality added to her beauty. Her face was somewhat fuller, and the lines purer; her figure and her carriage had gained in grace and dignity; and her eyes, less sad, showed more completely the exquisite purity of her mind. To these exterior advantages God had added gifts which the most readily inspire affection; a character always amiable and loving, remarkable sweetness and gentleness, and, above all, an unalterable serenity and evenness of temper, which she owed to the elevation of her mind and thoughts. It was impossible to see her without admiring her, and to know her without loving her, and desiring her good opinion. Her brothers, her family, the persons who composed the circle of intimate friends of the Hôtel de Choisy, everybody, in fact, who came in contact with her, felt for her as much affection as respect.

* Jean Phélipeaux, knight, Lord of Pontchartrain, President of the Court of Accounts, son of Paul P. de Pontchartrain, and of Anne de Beauharnais de Miramion.

This was the time in her life when she was the most urged to marry again. Among the numerous gentlemen who proposed to her, M. de Rubelle presented to her first, M. le Président Lecoigneux, Marquis de Plailly;* and, in the second place, M. le Conseiller Boucherat, chevalier, Seigneur de Compans, who later became Chancellor, and Keeper of the Great Seal of France;† both of them excellent matches, and rising men at court. "But she would listen to no proposals of the sort."‡

The family de Choisy, who had for some time entertained other views for her, only looked upon these refusals as caused by her repugnance for the candidates, and flattered themselves with the hope of inducing her to marry M. de Caumartin, her husband's first cousin.

This hope filled both families with joy; equally rich and influential, they ardently desired this second alliance, and spared no pains to bring it about. M. de Caumartin§ and M. de Miramion had been brought up together under the eye of their grandfather, M. de Choisy, and both of them sharing the same studies and the same amusements, had grown up in the midst

* Jacques le Coigneux, Marquis de Plailly, De Montmélian, and De Mortfontaine, President of Inquests.

† Louis Boucherat, Counsellor of Parliament, Comptroller in Brittany, Counsellor of State, and afterwards Chancellor.

‡ Choisy.

§ Louis François Lefèvre, chevalier, Lord of Caumartin, Master of Requests, and Counsellor of State, friend of the Cardinal de Retz, and of Madame de Sévigné, son of Louis L. de Caumartin and of Madeline de Choisy.

of this loving circle, without ever having been separated. Their tastes and characters were the same, and their friendship for each other had always remained as sincere as it was hearty. The premature death of M. de Miramion was their first separation. It was then that the devoted affection of M. de Caumartin shone forth in all its force, for never did a brother or a friend mourn another more sincerely.

But time had gone by, and M. de Caumartin, the confidant and witness of his cousin's happiness, had not been able to see it without envying him, and still less to know Madame de Miramion without appreciating and loving her.

His respect for the memory of M. de Miramion and the affliction of his widow had alone kept back the avowal he so longed to make.

At length, one day, encouraged by his family, and emboldened by the more resigned air of Madame de Miramion, he went to join her in the garden at the time he knew she was alone there with her little girl. The child, as soon as she saw M. de Caumartin, held out her arms to him, and as the young widow in lifting her up to him to kiss smiled on him with a confiding affection, he ventured to avow his feelings for her, and implored her in the name of her child, whom he already loved as a father, to accept him as her husband.

Madame de Miramion would have stopped him and informed him of the resolution she had taken, but in listening to the passionate words which escaped from his lips the remembrance of her husband was revived in her heart, and, greatly agitated and affected to

tears, she remained speechless, having only strength enough to seize her child in her arms and carry her off to her room, when she burst out crying.

However she had for some time past guessed the nature of the feelings she had inspired in M. de Caumartin. His looks, the caresses he bestowed on her little girl, all had revealed it to her a thousand times. But as she had never lost an opportunity of manifesting before him her dislike to the idea of a second marriage, she had hoped that he would, little by little, give up the idea of marrying her, and that his feelings would become more disinterested, and remain in future those of a loving brother.

M. de Caumartin, on the contrary, who was more in love with her than ever, seeing her go away in tears but not angry, interpreted her silence in a manner favourable to his wishes. Almost beside himself with joy, he went to confide his hopes to M. de Choisy, who, fully sharing in them, wrote to Rome to ask for the dispensation that their relationship rendered necessary, in order that the marriage might be celebrated at once, not doubting that the beautiful widow would give her consent. If the thought of a second marriage could have entered the heart of Madame de Miramion, it would have been on M. de Caumartin that she would have bestowed her hand. She knew how much he was beloved by his whole family, and as for herself, she had not known him so long without appreciating his rare qualities and having the highest esteem for him.

M. de Caumartin possessed all that was necessary to please as well as to be loved. "He was," says the Duke de Saint-Simon, who was not a flatterer, "a fine

man: tall and well-made, exceedingly clever both in law and finance,—one who knew everything in history, genealogy, or in anecdotes about the Court, with a memory which never forgot anything he had seen or read. Besides he was in the best society, very witty, obliging, and a very honourable man."

"Tout n'est pas Caumartin, Bignon, ni d'Aguesseau,"

wrote Boileau in his verses.

Madame de Miramion in writing of him in her "*Confessions*," avows also "that it required great firmness to resist his entreaties."

But He who had long before chosen her for His own could not permit that her heart, worthy of Him alone, should ever again be shared with any creature.

Her resolution remained, therefore, unshaken; but the courage necessary to inflict pain on those she loved was alone wanting, and kept back the refusal which she knew would be a grief and disappointment to them all. "In her weakness she had recourse to God, and implored Him with tears to make known to her His holy will."

It is the peculiar quality of pious souls in all the difficult circumstances of life to feel the necessity of conversing confidentially with God, to listen to His inspirations, and be enabled to follow them.

The prayer of Madame de Miramion was answered, and on Christmas day, 1648, as she was praying before the blessed Sacrament in the church of Saint Nicholas-des-Champs, she thought she heard God speak to her heart and say to her interiorly:

"You come to adore Me, my child; My abase-

ment, is it not a mark of my Omnipotence? Can I not sustain you in any position in which I choose to place you? Why, then do you put off so long giving yourself entirely to Me,—I, who give Myself wholly to you?"

This voice made such an impression on her heart that she remained absorbed in God during more than two hours, and only came to herself when informed that the church doors were going to be shut. Eight days afterwards, on the 6th of January, 1649, being the feast of the Epiphany, as she was again in the same church before the blessed Sacrament, and undecided as to what she ought to do, she asked her Lord with tears what she could give Him in remembrance of this day, when the Wise Men had offered Him all that they had most precious, and soon she thought she heard these words,—

"It is your heart I will have and nothing else: let it be wholly Mine."

At the same time she had a sort of strong and lively revelation of what God desired of her, and remained several hours in a kind of ecstasy. Later, her confessor having questioned her on this subject she replied, "It is easy to find out when it is God Himself who speaks, by the impression it makes on one's heart."

Henceforward the only wish of Madame de Miramion was to obey the voice which called her, so as to advance more rapidly in the path of Christian perfection. With this aim she took for her director M. l'Abbé du Festel, a priest attached to Saint Nicholas-des-Champs, a severe man, but one whose doctrines were above suspicion.

By his advice she opened her heart to her mother-in-law, who had always been exceedingly kind to her; and when she had communicated to her the resolution she had taken, she begged her to tell M. de Caumartin and her family the only reason of her refusal.* Madame de Miramion, who still mourned for the loss of her son, could easily forgive her daughter-in-law for not forgetting such a husband. However, she thought it her duty to oppose what she at first considered a hasty resolution; but finding that Madame de Miramion continued firm, she undertook herself to make known her pious determination.

Feeling how embarrassing must be the position for so young a woman with M. de Caumartin after the declaration he had made her, to live together in the same house, her mother-in-law advised her to retire again into a convent. She hoped that during her absence M. de Caumartin and her relations would get used to the idea of her perpetual widowhood, and would feel less pain in seeing her again afterwards.

IV.

MADAME DE MIRAMION gratefully accepted this offer, and on the 19th of January, 1649, by the advice of the

* M. de Caumartin regretted this decision for a very long time, and only consented to marry five years afterwards. He married Marie-Urbaine de Saint Marthe, who died in 1654, in giving birth to a son. He remained a widower for ten years, and Fléchier, who was his son's tutor, wrote an elegy on his resisting love's influence. At length, in 1664, he married secondly Catherine-Françoise de Verthamon.

Abbé du Festel, she entered the community of the "Grey Sisters," now called Sisters of Charity.

This house, established in 1642 by M. Vincent, near Saint-Lazare, had been founded and was still directed by Louise de Marillac, widow of M. Legras, secretary to the Queen Marie de Médicis, a pious lady who co-operated with the greatest zeal in all the good works originated by M. Vincent de Paul.

Mademoiselle Legras, as she was called (because then the nobility alone bore the title of *Madame*, and the others—even when married—preserved that of *Mademoiselle*), had begun by receiving into her own house, in the parish of Saint Nicolas-du-Chardonnet,* some pious young ladies who, under the direction and inspiration of the Abbé Vincent, consecrated themselves, with her, to the service of the poor, and formed themselves little by little into a small community under the name of Sisters of Charity, or Servants of the poor. But they were commonly called Grey Sisters on account of the colour of their habit.

Before forming them into a community, M. Vincent had reflected and hesitated for a long time, and often prayed to God to help him, for what he was about to create was something quite new in the Church.

Until that time religious congregations of women had been preserved from the distractions, the observation, and the fascination of the world by the walls of their monastery and by complete retirement; but was it not a strange innovation and to a certain degree rash, to wish to form a community of young girls who

* Mademoiselle Legras pronounced the formula of consecration on the 25th of March, 1634.

should have no other vows than their conscience, no other veil than their modesty, and no other barrier than the streets, where they were continually obliged to pass in performing their charitable duties?

In the face of the many difficulties which the execution of such a project presented and of all the dangers and scandals that were to be dreaded, what man would not have hesitated had he not been inspired by God?

Now that this idea has been so nobly realized, and an institution formed which has consoled and edified the whole Christian world by the incessant miracles of its charity,—now that the name of Saint Vincent de Paul is blessed by every one, while upwards of nineteen thousand of his holy sisters carry on and continue his gigantic work, this creation appears quite natural, but it was far from having the same character in the eyes of M. Vincent's contemporaries. A few years, however, sufficed to show all the good this modest work could do, and it soon had so many novices that the house of Mademoiselle Legras became inadequate to hold them, and the Abbé Vincent had the satisfaction of transplanting the community into much larger buildings near Saint Lazare.

It was about this time that some ladies began to be admitted there to make spiritual retreats. Madame la Présidente Goussault, Mademoiselle Lamy, daughter of one of the administrators of the general hospital, and Madame de Miramion were the first to take advantage of it. "Mademoiselle Legras received them with open arms," says the Abbé de Choisy. But the benevolent patronage and constant liberality of these

ladies towards the Sisters of Charity contributed also greatly to the success of this institution; it is then only just to look upon them as its first benefactresses.

Since that time, God, who in His admirable decrees had no doubt fixed the hour for this new creation, has not ceased to protect and bless it, enabling it to stem the tide of revolution and anarchy, and to shine as a living witness for the gospel of Love to the enemies and detractors of our faith throughout the world.

While Madame de Miramion followed with all the fervor of which she was capable this first retreat at Mademoiselle Legras', which the Abbé Vincent himself had undertaken to preach, she received another warning from Heaven.

"In the night of the 18th—19th January, 1649," she wrote later, by her confessor's order, "between two and three in the morning, being in retreat at Mademoiselle Legras', and in bed, it seemed to me that some one struck me on the shoulder. I awoke, thinking it was a sister come to call me to go to chapel. On opening my eyes I saw a great light round my bed, as if it had been a bright sunshine: I was much surprised, thinking it was very late; I heard a voice which thrilled me through and through, and which said, 'Be not surprised; it is I who am thy Lord and Master.' I threw myself on my knees upon my bed; the voice continued: 'Seek no more to know My will, and be not anxious about it; I assure thee that I will have thee wholly and entirely Mine, thy heart is not too large for Me. I choose to have thee entirely to Myself, and that thou shouldest be wholly occupied with Me alone. I will be thy Husband, thou shalt be

My spouse; engage thyself to Me. Give up false pleasures: thou shalt have troubles and sorrows, but be faithful to Me, and nothing shall harm thee. I will delight in thy humiliation, and will be in the midst of thy heart; delay no longer, the time is come; it is My Will.'

"I adored God in His mercy, and thanked Him for having taken me out of the painful position in which I was, by making known His will to me. I then felt great diffidence of myself, and was very much afraid; but it seemed as if God said to me, 'Am I not powerful enough?' I was consoled and strengthened by these words, and felt quite ready to take the vow of chastity; but it seemed to me that I heard this reply, 'Wait; tell him who directs thee what I have said, and obey him; but tell him all that has passed.' I promised to do so, and immediately the light went away, which astonished me exceedingly, because I thought it was broad daylight; and as I was full of these thoughts, I got up to thank God and to say my prayers, and the clock struck three. This prayer was a thanksgiving. I went to bed again, but I could not sleep. The following day I felt very coldly towards God, finding it difficult to believe what had happened in the night. I could not make up my mind to talk about it. However, I did not fail to tell my director, who had no doubt that it came from God. He obliged me to write down all about it, consulted M. Vincent upon the subject, and it was decided that I should at once take the vow of chastity; which I did on the 2nd of February. Since then I have never doubted my vocation; I have had trouble, but never

a doubt as to God's will in this matter; and what happened that night has always been present to my mind."

"Such a great step," says the Abbé de Choisy, "attached her entirely to God's service, and from that moment to the last hour of her life, she steadily advanced in virtue."

CHAPTER VI.

HOW MADAME DE MIRAMION SANCTIFIES HER WIDOWHOOD.

1649—1653.

"Love a hidden life, and be known to God alone."
Madame de Miramion.

"THE true widow," says Saint François de Sales,* "is in the church, like a March violet, who spreads around her an unparalleled sweetness by the odour of her piety, and holds herself constantly hidden under the large leaves of humility."

"She lives in fresh and uncultivated places, not to be importuned by the conversation of worldlings, so as to preserve the freshness of her heart against the temptations which the desire of wealth, honour, or even love might bring her."

Such was Madame de Miramion to be in her widowhood, and thus was she to pass the remainder of her life, always alone, always hidden from the eyes of the world, to which she only revealed her presence by the perfume of her virtues; laying aside her rank

* Introduction to a Devout Life. Chapter III.

and her riches, observing the greatest modesty and simplicity in dress, giving up all amusements, even card-playing,* to follow only an austere rule of penance, mortification, and charity.

How few the world sees of such widows according to the precept of Saint Paul, "who is a widow indeed and desolate, trusting in God and continuing in supplications and prayers night and day." How completely this noble position is forgotten among us! Madame de Miramion, however, practised it in all its severity, disengaging herself from the world in which she continued to live, and consecrating all the activity of her life to charity, and all the ardour of her soul to prayer, so that she might be truly said to live to God, and for God alone.

In order to observe strictly the rule of life she had laid down for herself at Sainte Marie, and from which she resolved never to deviate, she began immediately upon her return to the world, by giving to those around her her richest clothes and ornaments and her most valuable furniture. Then, although she had already given up wearing coloured materials, lace and jewels, she adopted a style of dress more strictly religious in character, without caring for what might be said of her.

So young a woman thus giving up all ornament and all amusement was then the more meritorious, and appeared the more extraordinary, because there had never been such a fever for worldly dissipation,

* Card-playing was then the rage in all places, and people often lost two or three thousand *Louis* at cards, even at the game of *reversi*.

nor such magnificence and luxury displayed in furniture and clothes as at that very period in France.

Galoons, fringes, gold and silver lace were used in profusion, and the fashion of the day which required for the ladies' costume a quantity of jewels, lace, and showy materials, allowed of men wearing silk, satin, and velvet, ornamented with gold embroidery, and ribbons, and with Flanders or Venice point lace for their ruffles and shirts.

To form some idea of the splendour and richness of these costumes, made in such costly materials as have not since been imitated, it is only necessary to read Madame de Sévigné's letters, where she says:

"M. de Langléé has given Madame de Montespan a dress of gold upon gold, embroidered in gold, bound with gold, and over all a waved gold, worked in gold, mixed with a certain gold, which makes the most divine material that ever was imagined; it is the fairies who wove it in secret. Ah, the beautiful thing! ah, what a material! does it come from heaven? for there is none like it upon earth."

It will be easily understood that Madame de Miramion in the midst of such a society must have had to bear much blame and raillery on account of the nun-like simplicity of her dress and the severity of her conduct. But although it pained her greatly (as she afterwards owned in writing her life), she endured it patiently and never flinched in her resolve.

Her relations, who had long dreaded her going into a convent, and whose only wish was to keep her with them, left her entirely free. The first use she made of her liberty was to devote herself to

works of charity. As she had a great deal of natural activity which found pleasure in work, and as her peculiar kind-heartedness disposed her to do good to every one around her, she devoted herself to this kind of life with all the ardour of her character.

Her mornings were spent with the poor of the parish, taking care of the sick, and dressing their wounds, even of those who had loathsome diseases. Often in the afternoon she went to the Hôtel-Dieu to visit the sick and to console them, and assist them, taking all the more interest in them as they were the more repulsive. Naturally delicate, refined, and particular about her person, she made it a merit before God to overcome her will, to mortify her tastes, and to crucify her natural inclinations.

Her evenings were consecrated to her grandfather, M. de Choisy, who had lost his wife during her stay at Mademoiselle Legras', and whose great age made him require constant care. Add to these charitable occupations the hours she devoted to her daughter, and those which she spent in prayer, and it will be seen that no moment was unemployed of this active existence.

II.

WHILE she sympathised keenly in every species of misfortune, Madame de Miramion had always had a most tender and special commiseration for orphan children. Deprived of her own parents in her youth, she knew by experience how irreparable was the loss. But since the birth of her child her sym-

pathy and pity had been increased by the tenderness she felt for her own little one, who had lost her father before her birth.

Under the influence of this feeling she at first adopted some little girls, whose expenses she paid; then, interesting herself more and more in the future existence of these children, she resolved to bring them together and have them educated under her own eyes, so as to preserve them from misery and sin.

With this object she hired a house near Saint Nicolas des Champs, in which she received twenty little girls, having neither father nor mother, and provided mistresses for them, who, under her direction, brought them up in the fear of God, and taught them to work, in order that they might earn their livelihood.

She often stole away from home to go and take her meals with these children, and instruct them herself. On these occasions she often took her little girl with her, and gave her rewards to distribute among them, wishing thus to associate her as much as possible in this work, in the hopes that it would give her child a taste for such occupations. She called this establishment the "House of the Holy Childhood," and supplied all its expenses until her daughter's marriage.

On the days when she did not go to the Hôtel-Dieu, Madame de Miramion, who looked upon all those who were unfortunate as brothers and sisters, chastised and tried by God to work out their salvation, did not fear to visit the prisons of Paris. Accompanied by an elderly woman and a faithful man-servant (without

whom she rarely went out), she distributed to the poor captives money, linen, clothes, and even food, and at the same time kind words and pious exhortations; for at that time prisons were far from being what they are in our days. They were generally old fortresses, the walls of which were thick and almost without apertures, the rooms low and damp, in which privations of every kind and physical suffering were added to moral penalties—cold, hunger, want of light and air, were among the lesser evils of these unwholesome dens, where all the crimes and vices that a civil war could engender were heaped indiscriminately together.

But at the same moment that the spirit of revolution and the troubles of the Fronde produced in public manners the most unbridled licence, God permitted that holy men such as Father de Bérulle, the Bishop de Belley, and the Abbé Vincent de Paul, should go about continually doing good, and spreading around them the love and practice of the most exalted virtue. At their voice; persons of the highest rank began to live exemplary lives; charitable foundations were multiplied; and Christian love inaugurated by the hands of women, new Orders of Charity, which have remained and will remain to benefit God's poor in all succeeding ages.

Among the institutions which the lively faith of that period produced everywhere, the most remarkable, perhaps, for the good it has done, and above all for that which its example has since inspired, was the Association of Ladies of Charity.

This good work, created by Vincent de Paul with the indefatigable assistance of Mademoiselle Legras,

in the modest parish of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet,* spread itself at once over all the parishes of Paris, and from thence went forth like the grain of mustard-seed to blossom throughout France.

This noble legion, recruited by charity among all classes and all parties, this glorious association of exemplary women, who, differing in rank and fortune, were yet equals in virtue, worked together as sisters, and vied with one another in zeal and devotedness for the service of the poor.

Madame de Miramion soon became one of the most zealous of the ladies of charity of the parish of Saint Nicolas des Champs, assiduously visiting the sick at the Hôtel-Dieu ; and furnishing completely a dispensary or special house, that had been taken near the hospital, to collect together and prepare the medical comforts which the ladies were afterwards to distribute to the sick poor.

Every year M. Vincent, who was the soul of these charitable congregations, gathered around him in a general meeting all the ladies of charity of the different parishes of Paris, and after having addressed to them a touching exhortation upon their general duties, he pointed out to them some special good action to perform, some new work to create, or some generous thought with which his great heart had just inspired him, and which he asked them to help him to realise.

It was thus that at the beginning of these associations, he had made the ladies of charity of the parish of Saint Nicolas share in the foundation of the first

* About 1635, with the Présidente Goussault, first foundress.

hospital which was established for the sick galley-slaves, and the construction of which at Marseilles (thanks to his solicitations) had been almost immediately paid for by the Cardinal de Richelieu, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, his niece, and the venerable bishop of that town, Mgr. Gault, whose memory is still greatly honoured in Provence. Later, he had associated these ladies in another foundation, which was to be more interesting to them, and be to him the work of predilection of his whole life.*

III.

"HAVING seen," says Choisy, "that no one thought of helping the children exposed and abandoned in the streets of Paris by poor or wicked mothers, this good servant of God sought some means to remedy this evil."

Until then, they had been brought to a house called *La Couche*, where a widow received them and took care of them; but as they were numerous, and the alms given for them were small, this arrangement could not suffice. The greater number died of want, and often the servants of the widow, to get rid of the annoyance of their crying, gave them a sleeping draught which killed them, or sold them to anybody who would buy them, without caring to have them baptised.

Such great horrors in a town like Paris touched M. Vincent's heart; he spoke of it to the ladies of charity

* This hospital was afterwards transferred to Toulon, where it still exists.

of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, and his eloquence and moving words inspired them with such a feeling of compassion for the poor little things that they immediately rented a house near the gate Saint Victor, in which Mademoiselle Legras, assisted by some grey sisters, received and brought up first twelve, and afterwards a greater number of children, either with the help of goat's milk, or of wet-nurses.

This little establishment, thanks to a revenue that M. Vincent obtained from the Queen, Anne of Austria, was kept up in a satisfactory manner till the end of the year 1648, but at that period it was very near falling to the ground, for the expenditure amounted to more than forty thousand francs a year, and the revenue did not reach twenty thousand. In the face of such a danger, M. Vincent called a meeting of all the ladies of charity.

It was at this moment that Madame de Miramion, who had been three years a widow, began to be a member of these congregations, and this important meeting was the first in which she took part.

He began by asking them to consider seriously if they were to cease or to continue to provide nourishment for these poor children; he gave the reasons for and against, and showed them that they had already brought up more than six hundred of them, who, in learning to speak, had learned to know and serve God. Then raising his voice, as we are told by his biographer, M. Abelly, Bishop of Rhodez, he concluded his exhortation by this touching peroration:

"Well now, ladies, compassion and charity made

you adopt these little creatures for your children. You have been their mothers by grace since their mothers by nature have abandoned them; decide now if you will abandon them also. Cease to be their mothers, and become their judges; their life and death are in your hands. I am going to put it to the vote; it is time to pronounce their sentence, and to ascertain if you will no longer have pity upon them. If you continue to take care of them they will live, but they will infallibly perish if you abandon them; experience leaves no doubt upon that point."

At first the ladies only replied by their tears; and then unanimously declared that the work must be supported at any cost, even if they were compelled to impose fresh sacrifices on themselves, and sell their jewels. Madame la Chancelière d'Aligre gave twenty thousand pounds, and M. le Président du Bercy the same sum. It is not known how much Madame de Miramion gave,—she concealed her good works as much as possible; but the sum must have been considerable if we reckon it by the tenderness she felt for these poor abandoned children, and the immense fortune she then possessed, her estates not having then been made over to the poor.

A house was bought in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, which a subsequent declaration of Louis XIV. raised into a Foundling Hospital, and a branch establishment was afterwards added opposite the Hôtel Dieu, which was endowed by the king's liberality. The direction of these establishments was afterwards united to the general administration of the hospitals; but Madame de Miramion assisted at all the meetings

held in the interest of the foundlings, and the administrators never came to an important resolution without having consulted her beforehand; and with all the more reason, as when they were in any difficulty she was always sure to remove it either by her talent or her purse.

Such was the humble origin of the magnificent Foundling Hospital, which, transferred in our days to the Rue d'Enfer, still receives an immense number of children, who are brought up with the same care by the worthy daughters of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Thus the zeal of this holy priest, and the persevering charity of some pious ladies, created and sustained a work which the Government adopted later, but before the magnitude of which they shrunk and drew back, until encouraged by the success which had attended this heroic effort of Christian charity. Let us now mention, for the honour of humanity and religion, the names of some of those Christian women who, though continuing to live in the world, devoted themselves to the relief of the unfortunate, and thus were the first in France to give the example and the idea of those charitable associations which have since become so universal.

Mesdames

Legras (Louise de Marillac).

La Présidente Goussault.

De Ville-Savin (widow of J. Phélippeaux, Lord de Ville-Ravin).*

* She was a relation of Madame de Miramion, and lived in one of the splendid mansions of the Place Royal, where she

Mesdames
De Bailleul.
Du Mecq.
De Sainctot (née Dalibray).*
De Pollalion (Marie de Lumague, foundress of the nuns of Providence).
De Beaufort.
Fouquet, the mother (Marie de Maupeou, widow of François Fouquet, Vicomte de Vaux).†
Nicolas Fouquet (Madeleine de Castile, widow of the Superintendent).
The Princess de Conti (Anne Martinozzi).
The Princess Marie de Gonzague.
The Princess de Lestang (Marie Delpech).
The Princess Lamy.
The Princess de Traversay (Anne Peteau, widow of L. Regnault, Lord).
The Duchess de Nemours.
The Duchess du Perche.
The Duchess d'Aiguillon.
The Duchess de Lesdiguières.
La Marquise de Maignelay (Marie de Gondy).
Elizabeth d'Aligre (wife of the Chancellor).
The Présidente de Lamoignon and her daughters: Madeleine de Lamoignon, and

received the best society; but as she was very fond of paying compliments, she had been nicknamed "the very humble servant of all mankind."

* To whom Voiture dedicated his translation of "Roland Furieux."

† She has left a collection of medical receipts, much employed for the poor.

The Présidente de Nesmond, born de Lamoignon.
De Miramion (Marie Bouneau de Rubelle.)
De Farinvilliers (Catherine Pepin, widow of François de Pingré, Lord).
De Sénécé (born de Larochefoucauld, widow of H. de Beaufremont, Marquis de Sénécé.)
De Brogelanne.
De Soucarière.
The Duchess de Noailles (Louise Bayer).
The Présidente de Herse.
The Comtesse de Loménie de Brienne.
The Baronne de Neuvillette (Madeline Robineau).
De Villeneuve (Marie Chuillier).
Tronson (Claude de Sève).
Leschassier and her daughter.
De la Rochejaquelein.
De Bouteville.
De Treuille.
De l'Esturgeon.

Unfortunately more than a hundred others have escaped all our researches; but their names are written in the Book of Life.

But when he whose influence had given birth to these benevolent undertakings was praised for them, or when he was spoken to of the good done by these associations of pious women, who relieved so much misery and brought so many souls to God, he replied "that he had nothing to do with these institutions."

God is indeed the only Author of all good, and it is God who inspired him with the words which touched all hearts. Men are but as instruments in God's hands to carry out His purposes of mercy, and only

happy and great in proportion as they can do so. They sow the seed to which God gives the increase. But in order to obtain the plentiful blessing of Heaven, the seed must be good, the intention pure and disinterested; and the more generous the idea the more it draws down graces and brings forth fruit.

IV.

CARRIED away by the ardour and generosity of her nature, and always giving to the extent of and even beyond her means, Madame de Miramion would have been worn out in health, strength, and fortune at the very beginning of her charitable career if the wise foresight of her director had not stayed her in time. But the Abbé du Festal, who joined to the experience of his age a father's solicitude for the chosen soul whom God had confided to him, seeing with what imprudent zeal she devoted herself to the poor, judged it necessary to stop her for a time, and advised her to spend a year in retirement, in order to think of nothing but her own improvement.

"You must begin by yourself before thinking of others," he said to her; "dissipation, even in good works, is dangerous for so young a person. Solitude is necessary for you; converse with God in the secret of your own heart; make known your wants to Him, and accustom yourself to His divine Presence. Moses remained forty days upon the mountain before he spoke to the people: let your days be occupied with prayer, meditation, and pious books. You will require great

grace to resist the continual temptations of the world: lay in a good provision before you are again exposed to them."

She followed this wise advice, and remained a whole year in almost complete retirement, spending much time in thought, meditation, and prayer to God, and occupying herself with the performance of her duties to her child and her parents, whose health, weakened by age, became more and more feeble.

During this retreat she wrote out the following resolutions for herself, in order to remember them better and remain more faithful to them:

"Act in all temporal things in union with the spirit of Jesus Christ.

"Take care to make my child pray with me morning and evening.

"Make her study sometimes, and instil good thoughts into her mind. Teach her to obey with readiness and simplicity.

"Enter into her amusements, and try to bring her up as something precious in the sight of God, offering her to Him every day.

"Never omit regular reading and prayer.

"Enter into the wants and difficulties of my servants, but speak to or reprove them in private.

"Converse on serious things with the sisters of the orphanage of the Holy Childhood. Recommend peace and good understanding amongst them; encourage them in love, gentleness, and charity.

"Speak sometimes to my brothers about their duties as Christians, but in private, and with tenderness and gentleness. If I have any observations to

make to them, do it with tact and in a spirit of charity, humility, and self-abasement.

"Take care to keep my temporal affairs in good order; write down everything; settle my accounts regularly with my daughter's honorary guardian; pay for everything in ready money; retrench something trifling in my personal expenses, and be very economical for the sake of Christ's poor.

"I will save as much as possible on myself and my daughter, and will give the remainder of my revenue in charity.

"Give besides out of my daughter's fortune three thousand francs a year to the poor:* exhort my brothers to give to them also.

"Learn to know God through faith, submitting myself to all He desires from me.

"Bear with myself in my defects, which pride makes me impatient of; and still more so with the little shortcomings of those around me: find fault with them gently and charitably, and never pain them if I can help it.

"When compelled to give any orders, do it more as asking a favour than as issuing a command, and receive all service rendered as a charity done to me.

"Labour to annihilate my self-love by humiliation; let me be penetrated with the idea of my own nothingness: to nothing, nothing is due.

"Not to seek to gratify my own inclinations, or be too eager for consolations; to act by faith, and for

* Madame de Miramion having the guardianship of her daughter, and the use of her income, disposed of it as she thought fit.

God only; to wait upon God for everything, as if I could do nothing, and to work as if it were I who must do all.

"Receive contradictions, contempt, and annoyance, with pleasure, and humiliations with open arms, as a great treasure.

"Shun all praise, approbation, and respect from, as well as too great affection for creatures.

"Put a stop immediately to conversations which are in my favour, or that of those belonging to me, and never give an occasion for them.

"Be as amiable as usual with those who have said or done anything against me; and be with them as if nothing had happened."

It would have been difficult for Madame de Miramion not to make great progress in Christian perfection while acting up to such resolutions. Persuaded, moreover, that bodily mortifications are necessary to overcome our passions and become really penitent, she began those austerities which she continued to the end of her life.

She slept upon two wooden planks tied together with ropes, which folded up, and during the day she hid them carefully in her dressing-room, having her bed made regularly, in order that it should not be known. She fasted on bread and water every Friday, and wore one day in the week a heavy iron chain as thick as four fingers.

At the end of this year of rigorous retirement, that is to say, in 1651, her confessor allowed her gradually to resume her active life, and devote herself once more to the care of the poor.

She was named Treasurer of the Poor of Saint Nicolas des Champs, and as it was during the worst period of the civil wars, she found plenty of opportunities for exercising her indefatigable and charitable zeal.

The bloody and useless engagement of Porte Saint Martin had taken place; a fratricidal conflict in which Louis XIV. (then fifteen years of age) had seen Turenne take possession in his name of his revolted capital, which was defended by Condé, who had turned rebel; and Mademoiselle de Montpensier firing the cannon of the Bastille upon the royal troops. It was a victory costing both sides dear; and after which Condé, bursting into tears, exclaimed with truth, "I have lost all my friends!"

The rude school of misfortune which affected all classes of society, brought people to their senses; and the parliament soon after returning to its allegiance to the king, tranquillity was restored in Paris.

But the war had brought into the town a considerable number of persons, who no longer finding themselves safe in their castles or in the faubourgs, came to seek protection behind the ramparts of Paris. The peasants, by bringing their cattle with them, had still further augmented the already crowded population, and the insalubrity of the air; and contagious maladies soon began to develope themselves. The small-pox especially (a disease which was then almost always fatal) made the most awful ravages; and, to complete this catalogue of misfortunes, the devastation of the country produced a famine, and bread cost twenty-four sous a pound.

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Madame de Miramion, whose active benevolence seemed to increase in proportion to the evils against which she had to struggle, devoted herself entirely to the relief of the misery around her. She nursed the sick night and day, even beyond her strength; and was ingenious in devising new means for feeding the famished multitudes,* while she contrived by perseverance and energy to provide for them more than two thousand meals a day.

But as it was a sensible pleasure for her to distribute these portions herself, she often deprived herself of it from a spirit of penitence. "*It seems to me*," she said, "*that when I serve the poor, I have no great merit, because I am repaid in doing it, and cannot expect a reward for what gives me so much pleasure.*"

She had, in fact, such a great satisfaction in assisting and relieving the poor, that she spent in that one year, without being aware of it, all her income and all her savings. When she had nothing more to give, and that she saw want and famine still increasing, she sold a splendid pearl necklace, which the hard times obliged her to give, for eighty thousand francs, a sum much below its value. But thanks to this sacrifice the poor continued to have their soup.

"*God gave me a good inspiration*," she said to her confessor, "*I got rid of an occasion of vanity, and at the same time I found means to assist many wretched creatures.*"

The following year was again one of those seasons

* They were immense cauldrons, of which the soup kitchens of our days are an imitation.

when, as the prophet says, "the heavens were of brass and the earth of fire." The famine increased; mothers died of want before the eyes of their children, and children sunk in their mother's arms for want of bread. Madame de Miramion gave away everything she possessed, sold all she had left of precious things, and soon her silver plate met with the same fate as her necklace.

In the provinces the dissensions which divided France were far worse than at Paris. Balzac, who lived in the country, wrote on the 10th May, 1652, to his friend Conrart, who had remained in the capital during this terrible struggle:

"If God does not soon have pity upon us, and send us His beloved daughter, who is Madam Peace, I am perfectly decided to fly from scenes which simply break one's heart. Were I even older and feebler than I am now, I would sooner leave the kingdom, with the chance of dying at sea, if I were to embark at La Rochelle, or in some inn, if I travel by land, than encounter all day long such pitiful objects."

These troubles created a thousand disorders and misfortunes in the country. Madame de Miramion, who thought far more of the wants of the soul than of those of the body, caused missions to be preached at her expense in several villages. She went herself in the neighbourhood of Paris to instruct and exhort the women and children, and only returned home after having established grey sisters, who took care of the sick, and kept the schools.

V.

"IN the midst of so many good works Madame de Miramion was not yet, however, entirely dead to the world," says her severe biographer; "she was still fond of refinement and luxury, especially in the furniture of her own rooms."

Perhaps in spite of her privations and austerities, she had preserved those habits of minute neatness, and that care of her person which is part of the primary education of the upper classes. Even St. Theresa accuses herself of having long clung to these little things, especially in her dress. "I paid great attention to the whiteness of my hands," she says, in the relation of her life, "and took much care of my hair; I spared neither perfumery nor any other of those inventions of vanity in which I was exceedingly skilful. I had no wrong intention, but during many years I preserved a strong love for this excessive refinement."

As to Madame de Miramion's liking for handsome furniture and everything that was beautiful, it came to her from her education and training, but above all from her exquisite taste and judgment. The fine arts had just been revived in France; and never since Henri II., had such rich furniture or such magnificent hangings been made, or apartments decorated with so much symmetry, splendour and elegance. Magnificence was, so to speak, in the very atmosphere of France from the beginning of the seventeenth century. The beautiful hotel of Madame de Rambouillet and the celebrated blue bedroom of this elegant Marquise,

had first inspired this taste in Paris, for all that was beautiful, grand, and refined; a taste which was to spread itself, not only throughout France, but also through all Europe.

Madame de Miramion, finding it necessary to re-arrange the apartment she occupied in the Hôtel de Choisy, had a bed and a set of furniture made for her room in velvet, "couleur Isabel," black and white, and took great pleasure in having it done up with taste.

The ladies of that period received their visitors reclining, completely dressed, upon their beds, and this piece of furniture, of which the fashionable ladies particularly made almost a throne by raising it on an estrade, in a gilt alcove, under a rich canopy, was then everywhere the principal ornament of the bedroom.

Madame de Miramion one day received thus in her bedroom the visit of a person for whom she had the greatest respect. This person (who was doubtless her confessor) begged her to conduct him into her real room.

"*But I have no other*," she replied.

"I should not have thought, madame," said the visitor, coldly, "that the room of a Christian widow could be so magnificent."

The following day she changed her bed for one hung in grey cloth, without any ornament; and without mentioning what had passed, assured her family that it was more to her taste. She gradually made away with all the beautiful things she still possessed and to which she was much attached. The hair was then, as now, one of the principal beauties of women; hers was magnificent, both in quantity and colour;

she had it cut off under pretence that its weight made her head ache.

She had already given up wearing coloured dresses, lace and jewels; she soon afterwards left off the silk dresses which befitted her position, and only wore common woollen materials, either black or grey, which, however, when worn by her, appeared graceful and elegant.

In 1653 M. de Miramion, her father-in-law, died; her mother-in-law, whose health had never recovered the loss of her son, only survived her husband a few days. Madame de Miramion, to whom they had always shown the greatest kindness, lavished on them the tenderest care, assisted them in their last moments and mourned for them as if they had been her own parents.

Some months afterwards, M. de Choisy, who had survived all his children, died in her arms, full of years and prosperity, universally esteemed and respected. He loved Madame de Miramion as much or more than his own children; her wit, amiability, and kindness had entirely won his heart, and he left her (as a proof of his gratitude for her care and attention) more than a hundred thousand crowns.

CHAPTER VII.

MADEMOISELLE DE MIRAMION.

1653—1660.

"God has given you to me, my daughter; what have I to complain of?"—LAMMENAIS.

MARIE MARGUERITE DE BEAUHARNAIS DE MIRAMION was at this time just eight years old; she was a pretty child, gentle and docile; but as if her mother's grief had saddened her unconsciously even before her birth, she was always delicate, pale, and serious. She never complained, but she rarely smiled; she was very quiet and calm—and calmness at her age gives the impression of bad health. It seemed as if the many tears which had fallen on her cradle had frozen her poor little heart.

Her health was always exceedingly delicate, and every year she had a dangerous illness; her mother, while doing all in her power to save her, offered her freely to God.

"Lord," she said, with Abraham's faith, "I offer her to Thee as a willing sacrifice. If she may not

live and die a good Christian, take her at once, Lord; her salvation is dearer to me than her life."

God was satisfied with the sacrifice of her will, and gave her back her child. From the first moment of her birth she had been the one object of her heart's affection, and of her most devoted care. Neither the pre-occupation consequent on her life of active charity, nor the length of her religious exercises, had ever for a moment interfered with the daily attention she paid to her health and education. Convinced that religion is the first and only education, her great object was to infuse into her heart a love of piety, teaching her to make every morning at first a quarter of an hour and afterwards half an hour's meditation, proportioning this holy practice to her age and delicate health. She taught her her catechism, not by rote, as is usually the case, but with explanations adapted to her capacity, and accustomed her to go to mass, and to pay great attention to follow its meaning. Speaking to her about priests, she would say:

"You cannot have too much reverence for those who offer such an adorable Sacrifice; they make God descend upon our altars, and command, so to speak, the very Lord of heaven and earth."

She thus prepared her to the best of her ability for the fulfilment of the greatest duty of our holy religion—her first communion; this great step in life which the age and precociousness of Mademoiselle de Miramion already allowed her to accomplish worthily.

Nevertheless, on the approach of this great day Madame de Miramion, tormented by that diffidence of herself which true piety always inspires, thought it

her duty to separate herself from her daughter, and to place her in the hands of those whom she considered more worthy and more capable of instructing her than herself. She confided her to the Mother Eugénie,* Superior of the nuns of the Visitation, whom she had learned to know and love during her stay at Sainte Marie. But at the same time she gave ten thousand crowns to this monastery, on condition that she and her daughter should be acknowledged as "benefactors," in order to have the right of going in and out of it when it suited them.

This favour was all the more sought for because the wise director of the Visitation, Vincent de Paul, fearing worldly distractions, kept the doors of this convent very severely shut. He refused the entry of it to ladies of the highest rank, even to princesses, who applied for it solely to satisfy their curiosity, or from a mistaken devotion. From this rule the "benefactresses" alone were exempted, and he kept an exact list of them. This title of "benefactress" could not be acquired by generosity alone, but only when joined to pure faith and solid virtue.

Although she had every facility for seeing her daughter, and had the pleasure of doing so every day, Madame de Miramion felt this first separation ex-

* Louise Eugénie de Fontaines, born in 1608, celebrated for her talents and her virtues, was at first under the direction of Saint François de Sales, and afterwards of Saint Vincent de Paul, who had a high esteem for her. Anne of Austria felt the greatest confidence in her judgment, and often went to see her. The most distinguished persons sought her acquaintance and asked for her advice. She died on the 29th of September, 1694.

ceedingly. It was right, however, that she should make the sacrifice, for it was then customary for all young ladies of good family to spend some years in a convent.

Madame de Sévigné herself, that model of loving mothers, placed her daughter at Sainte Marie, and many years afterwards, in thinking of the pain this separation had caused her, she wrote thus to her:

"My dear daughter, I admire the courage I had in putting you into a convent. The certainty of seeing you often, and of taking you back, made me make up my mind to this cruelty which was then considered proper, and necessary for your education."

Madame de Miramion's health, which had been considerably weakened by the cruel and frequent losses she had lately sustained, gave way completely in the solitude in which her daughter's departure had left her. A serious illness declared itself, and her life was in danger.

Looking death in the face without fear, she only thought of the salvation of her child whom she would leave an orphan, and wrote her the following letter:

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

"I pray God to grant you His blessing. These are the last words I have to say to you: Love God with all your heart, and serve Him faithfully; love the poor and assist them to the utmost of your power; walk in the Gospel path, which ought to be your rule; observe it inviolably; renounce the vanities of the world, God is not to be found there; trust in Him, and He will take care of you. Do nothing without the advice of M. du

Festal and the Mother Eugénie, they are straightforward and good, and they love you. Your uncle de Rubelle will see to your temporal affairs; your uncles love you, trust in them and respect them.

"Adieu, my dear and more than very dear child! I leave you God for your father; you are well with Him; I leave you to Him; die rather than offend Him.

"Pray to God, and have prayers said for me; once again, adieu for a short time, for we shall meet again before God.

"Your mother and best friend,

"MARIE BONNEAU DE MIRAMION."

However, Madame de Miramion got better, and God preserved her life for the sake of the poor. But she remained in a state of debility which could not be explained, until her medical men perceived that she had a swelling in her bosom, and declared it was cancer.

The announcement of this horrible disease, the ravages and consequences of which she too well knew, did not in the least dismay her. She even resolved to apply no outward remedy, and to abandon herself completely to the will of God. The example of one of her friends who had put herself into the hands of some quack, strengthened her in this resolution, for a short time afterwards the poor lady died in her arms in awful sufferings, and the terrible disease emitted such an odour that Christian charity alone could make it bearable. She had frequent palpitations, and such constant sickness that she often fainted from exhaustion. They then obliged her to take medicine and be bled, but she never permitted the cancer itself to be touched; nor could she be persuaded to give up any

of her fasting, prayers, austerities, or any of her numerous works of charity.

Her brothers, seeing how much she suffered from weakness and increasing thinness, although she never complained, consulted the best physicians about her, and from their advice they forced her to go and drink the waters at Bourbon l'Archambault.

She went there in her coach, taking with her (on account of the length and difficulty of the journey) six horses, two coachmen, two men-servants on horseback, to escort her, and two female attendants. She travelled from break of day until it was quite dark, and often went on foot for fear of being overturned in the ruts; only resting herself a few hours at dinner-time on the cushions of the coach, and then continuing her journey until she halted for the night in some hotel at Fontainebleau, La Charité, Nevers or Moulins.

In this last town Madame de Miramion passed some days in the Convent of the Visitation, where she had the honour of seeing the Duchesse de Longueville. This princess, who had been exposed to continual and terrible afflictions, and had witnessed the destruction of all her hopes, at thirty-five years of age was about to withdraw from the world, and give herself entirely to God.

Her aunt, the illustrious widow of the Duke de Montmorency, who had been beheaded at Toulouse, was then superior of the ladies of the Visitation of Moulins, and was to receive her vows.

The calm and the austerity of this house, in the midst of the fatigues of a painful journey, charmed

Madame de Miramion, and often afterwards the remembrance of this pious and quiet home came back to her mind, and gave her a longing to be a nun in the provinces. Every morning it was her greatest joy to go and pray for some time in the humble room where Sainte Chantal, the foundress of the Order, had come to die; and every evening she forgot the passing hours in the chapel of the monastery before the noble mausoleum that the Duchess de Montmorency had just raised to the memory of her husband. The sight of this magnificent monument, the inspiration of a wife's love, made her tears flow gently, by reviving the memory of her own like sorrow.

One day Madame de Grignan came in her turn to admire this tomb, and as she also sighed in looking at it, her friend, Madame de Guénégaud, mistaking the feeling which caused her sadness, said to her, "Sigh, sigh, Madame; I have accustomed Moulins to the sighs which are brought from Paris!"

At last, after a journey of ten days, and a great deal of suffering, partly caused by the bad state of the roads, Madame de Miramion arrived at Bourbon. But charity seemed to be the first necessity of her being; and she was hardly rested before she took up all her habits of piety and benevolence, visiting the poor, and taking care of the sick in the hospital. Bourbon, which Madame de Montespan and the great ladies of the Court of Louis XIV. were to enrich and bring into fashion twenty years later, was then only a small town, very little known, and very poor. The country itself, to judge by what Madame de Sévigné says of it, was not calculated to attract any one. "It

is ugly and stifling," she writes to her daughter, "and all that can be said of the place is:—

"It is a frightful valley
Which never had a loving look from heaven."

"C'est un vallon affreux
Qui n'eut jamais du ciel un regard amoureux."

But its poverty and privations were so many titles to Madame de Miramion's sympathy, and during her short stay she not only looked after the poor, but gave silver chalices to several churches which had only tin ones; and had all the ornaments of the parish church restored under her own eye. Not daring, for fear of distractions, to apply herself to long prayer, while drinking the waters, she made it a rule to keep herself always in the presence of God, offering Him all her sufferings, and the sacrifice of life itself, if that should be required of her; conforming herself in all things to His holy will.

But God, who had other designs for His faithful spouse, sustained and strengthened her, in the midst of her infirmities; for the cancer in her breast never burst, and she was able during the long years it lasted to continue all her religious practices without intermission.

This disease became thenceforward as an habitual penance laid upon her by God instead of those she was wont to inflict on herself. She suffered cheerfully, nay, almost gaily; and many of those who knew her never suspected what cruel pain she had to bear.

II.

ON her return from Bourbon she was obliged to change her abode, the Hôtel de Choisy having fallen to the share of M. de Caumartin. She had to leave the patriarchal dwelling where her happy marriage had brought her at sixteen, full of hope and joy; where she had tasted for six months the purest happiness, and in which friendship and devotedness had ever since been her portion. She tore herself away, but not without tears, from this spot which, although it was full of sad memories of those she had loved, still reminded her that she also had had her share of this world's happiness.

Having no other thought than to be near her daughter, and occupy herself with her education, she purchased a house in the Rue St. Antoine, near Sainte Marie. However, just as she was going to take possession of it, her brothers came to her and made a proposal which filled her with joy.

During her journey to Bourbon, the eldest M. de Rubelle, Privy Councillor, had married, and the three younger brothers, who had always looked upon him as a father, and trusted him with the administration of their affairs, felt that they ought to leave him alone to his new family ties, and release him from all further responsibility. But accustomed to live together in the most affectionate intimacy, they could not make up their minds to separate from each other after leaving M. de Rubelle. In this perplexity they went to their sister, and all three begged to go and live with her.

Madame de Miramion, to whom nothing could be more agreeable, consented with all her heart, and "there never was," says her biographer, "a family who lived in such perfect union."

Unfortunately war, that curse of families, even more than of nations, did not allow them to enjoy long the pleasure of living together. In the spring of 1655, M. de Tracy, who was a colonel of cavalry, and M. de Purnon, who was standard-bearer in one of his brother's companies, were obliged to join the armies in Flanders and Luxembourg in which they served.

When they were leaving, Madame de Miramion, seeing the immense expense entailed by their camp equipage, and fearing the perils of the battle-field, proposed to them to leave to each other mutually a large portion of their fortune, so that if one of the two were killed, the survivor might be able more easily to support his position in the army. She herself, with the approval of the whole family, drew up the act which disinherited her as well as her two brothers, MM. de Rubelle and de Bellefond. Alas! her fears were only too soon verified. At the very outset of the campaign M. de Tracy fell mortally wounded in a cavalry charge at Landrecies. The only details we have about his death are those given in the Memoirs of Bussy, the former abductor of Madame de Miramion, who, as being himself a colonel of light cavalry, thus relates the event:

"In the night between the 2nd and 3rd of July, 1655, the works of the siege (of Landrecies) being greatly advanced, and the two mines for the attack being ready, at four o'clock in the afternoon of the

3rd they were sprung and made two openings. Some soldiers were killed, and de Tracy, colonel of a cavalry regiment, having followed the Marshal de Turenne into the trenches, chose to volunteer for this dangerous service. He was killed by a musket shot which passed through his body. It was a great pity, for he was a very promising young fellow, with a great deal of wit and amiability."*

The will that M. de Tracy had made in favour of his brother was carried out in spite of the opposition of M. de Purnon, who did not wish to take advantage of it; but in reality he did not gain much by his brother's generosity, the expenses of the war having considerably diminished his income.

Madame de Miramion sorrowed deeply at her brother's death. He possessed the most charming qualities. She had almost brought him up as her own child, while he had always shown her the most filial tenderness. Her grief was only modified by time, aided by religion and her love for her daughter.

In the year 1657 Madame la Duchesse de Roquelaure, the charming Mademoiselle de Daillon du Lude, whom Madame de Miramion had formerly met at the mineral waters of Forges, became alarmingly ill without its being possible to give any name to or find any cause for her strange malady. A few days before she had appeared in all the brilliancy of her youth and beauty, and Madame de Sévigné, that faithful echo of the society of the seventeenth century, wrote to her cousin de Bussy, "Madame de Roquelaure is come

* *Mémoirs de Bussy*, edition of Charpentier, by Lalanne, vol. i., page 411.

back so very beautiful that yesterday she outshone the whole Louvre."

At Court every one was still speaking of the admiration which her piquant beauty had called forth, when they heard that she was dying. The health of the Duchesse de Roquelaure had indeed given way most rapidly, and feeling that her illness was incurable she sent for Madame de Miramion, remembering with pleasure the days of innocent happiness they had passed together at Forges, and finding some consolation in the thought of dying in the arms of such a noble and dear friend.

Madame de Miramion, who had been separated from the Duchesse de Roquelaure by the difference of their lives and position, hastened to her as soon as she heard of her illness, and did not leave her till the end, nursing her with the tenderest care, and giving her to the last every help and encouragement. She herself wrapped her in her winding-sheet, and only returned home when she had seen her laid in the grave.

Madame de Roquelaure was only twenty-three, and died, it is said, from the pangs of an unhappy attachment. She was generally regretted, being as much beloved for her sweetness, gentleness, and grace as she was admired for her beauty. The whole Court was saddened by her death, and felt it had lost one of its brightest ornaments.

III.

MADEMOISELLE DE MIRAMION was growing up, and her mother, who was as anxious about her health as

about her education, took her out from Sainte Marie three times a week. She generally drove her into the country for change of air; but she took advantage of these excursions to teach her how to catechise little children and to speak to them of God; and gave her alms to distribute among the poor, in order to show her how she ought to assist the soul as well as the body.

In spite of her tender love for her child she did not however spare her in the performance of the obligations laid upon all Catholics, and always made her observe Lent, whatever might be the opinion of her medical men. "She shall not continue if it makes her ill," she said cheerfully, "but as long as I can, my daughter shall be a good Christian."

She even went further, and sometimes took her with her to the hospitals, not fearing any infection when the glory of God and the good of her neighbour were concerned. "My child," she would say to her, "the road to the hospitals is a road which leads to heaven."

When she was eight years of age she began by giving her four hundred francs for pocket-money and obliged her to write down the way she spent it, and to give her an account of it, so that when she had more to spend she should have acquired habits of order and self-denial. One day, wishing her to apply the advice she so often had given her, she brought her two silk frocks: "Choose, my child," she said; "if you take the simpler one there will remain four pistoles to give to the poor," wishing thus to accustom her early to perform good works of her own free will.

From the age of twelve she had treated her like a sister, never finding fault with her without telling her the reason, and accompanying the reproof with marks of the tenderest affection. "I insist," she said, "upon your telling me all you think; if my reasons are better than yours you will give in to them; but if yours are better than mine I will listen to yours."

Such gentle and wise tenderness could not fail to inspire a similar feeling, and Mademoiselle de Miramion always had for her mother the obedience, respect, and tenderness of a most devoted daughter.

This wise mother, who had watched over her daughter's first thoughts in order to direct them heavenwards, did not, however, wish to shut her up in a convent: on the contrary she did her utmost to prepare her for the life in the world to which her birth entitled her and to which Madame de Miramion felt she was called.

She sought to inspire her with a dread of the world, but not an aversion for it, teaching her to live in it without giving herself up to it,—to beware of its snares without flying from it altogether,—to look upon it, in fact, as an apostolate, and be herself an example of all purity, piety, and charity. When she was fourteen she took her away from the convent and had her taught to dance, not so much for the sake of going to balls as to give her a graceful carriage. Then, sacrificing all her own tastes and habits, she thought it her duty to take her herself to a grand ball given by her aunt, Madame la Comtesse de Choisy, in honour of

Mademoiselle de Montpensier, wishing to be the first to show her the dangers and the frivolity of those amusements in which her position would oblige her to mingle hereafter.

But on returning home after the ball she said to her, "Beware, my dear child, of being carried away by bad example; you must not content yourself with shunning evil, you must also do good. Above all, be charitable: love the poor; and let your greatest ornament be modesty. Do not go into extremes of any kind; follow the fashions without exaggerating them. Follow the example of prudent persons, but without criticising others."

Every one at that time was full of the magnificent plays which were beginning to be organized to amuse the King, and above all of the wonderful representations at the opera, which the Cardinal Mazarin had introduced from Italy. But Madame de Miramion, who remembered the impression which the theatre had formerly made upon herself, did not choose to take her daughter to the opera. She thought, like the Marquise de Sablé, that all these amusements were dangerous for Christians. But among all that the world has ever invented, none is so tempting as the theatre, because it represents human passions so naturally and so delicately that it awakens them in our own hearts even before we are aware of it.

When Lent cut short the ballets, masquerades, and all the other pleasures which the youthful monarch multiplied around him, a way was devised for prolonging them by allying amusement to religion. It was thus that began what were then called concerts

of devotion, and which have since been termed oratorios. They were executed in the convents at the hour of vespers by the most celebrated musicians and singers, in the presence of the King and all the Court. Madame de Miramion, who had not the same objections to these concerts as she had to the opera, sometimes took her daughter to them. They were present at one of the most celebrated, which was given in the monastery of Charonne, of which Loret said, with his usual naïveté :

Le Père Senault y prêcha
Et son éloquence toucha,
De même qu'à l'accoutumée ;
Bref, chacun eut l'âme charmée,
En ce saint lieu de grand renom,
Tant du concert que du sermon.

But what the poet does not mention is the flattering murmur which hailed the arrival of these two ladies.

Without being as beautiful as her mother, Mademoiselle de Miramion was nevertheless very pretty. Dark, short and perhaps somewhat too slight, but well made and full of grace and modesty in her manner, she had large, brilliant, merry, black eyes, dark brown hair, and a very fair skin, all of which gave her a most engaging appearance. Her nose was long, her mouth small, and her features, which were extremely regular, gave a great air of refinement to her countenance.

A portrait of her at this period, preserved by the heirs of her uncle, M. de Purnon, in the château of

Marsay in Poitou, represents her as we have described her. She is sitting, and holding on her knees a little pet dog; her court dress is in rich white silk, with a green scarf placed across her shoulders. She wears magnificent pearls in her hair, on her neck, and in her ears; but the body, in accordance with Madame de Miramion's strict principles, shows hardly anything of her bosom, and that only through a deep lace.

"In her youth," says Bussy, "little Marie had the idea of becoming a nun; but the Mother Eugénie, after having examined her vocation (without preoccupying herself with the interests of her convent), dissuaded her from it, and was the first to advise her to remain in the world, and even to marry early; only making her promise that she would always live as a good Catholic, which she engaged herself to do in writing."

As soon as she appeared in the drawing-room of the Luxembourg, where the gay and lively wit of the Comtesse de Choisy always attracted the best and most agreeable society, every one made much of this "little wonder," whose fortune and beauty rendered her one of the most desirable matches in Paris.

Every day the best and most brilliant nobles of the Court came as suitors for her hand. Madame de Miramion, full of confidence in the good sense and precocious judgment of her daughter, told her of all the offers made to her, and discussed them with her, not choosing to impose on her as was the custom, either her own will, or her personal taste. But neither vanity nor the pageantry of the Court or of the army had any effect upon her. And Madame de Miramion,

pleading her daughter's extreme youth, always put off the most flattering proposals.

She certainly wished to marry her child according to her rank and fortune; but she desired still more to establish her in a virtuous family, where good examples, hereditary and domestic, would confirm her in the right path, and make her really happy.

Embarrassed which to choose among so many pressing suitors, the mother and daughter redoubled their prayers and alms, in order that God should inspire them on such an important occasion, when the Président Lamoignon* came to ask Mademoiselle de Miramion in marriage for his nephew the Counsellor de Nesmond.

The high position of M. de Lamoignon, and the consideration which this eminent magistrate so justly enjoyed, gave the greatest weight to his wishes. Besides, his two sisters, the Présidente de Nesmond and Mademoiselle de Lamoignon† had been for ten years the most intimate friends of Madame de Miramion. This friendship and the profound esteem on which it was based, quickly decided her in favour of this alliance.

* Guillaume de Lamoignon, Marquis de Basville, first President of the Parliament of Paris, used to rest himself from his arduous labours as a magistrate by the performance of pious and charitable works. His favourite saying was, "My health and my life belong to the public and not to myself."

† Both of them were exceedingly pious, and were members of the associations of charity formed by Vincent de Paul. Their mother, under the direction of St. François de Sales, had founded an association for the release of prisoners for debt.

No marriage, indeed, could offer greater guarantees of happiness, and at the same time more suitability of family and fortune.

Président Théodore de Nesmond,* Knight, Lord of Saint Dizan, father of the gentleman, was that parliamentary *frondeur*, or rather that courageous magistrate, who had not feared some years before to go to Compiègne at the head of a deputation from the Parliament to ask the king to send away the Cardinal Mazarin. And when Louis XIV., crimson with anger, interrupted him in the midst of his harangue by snatching away the paper he held in his hand, the conscientious President, before he consented to withdraw, continued his remonstrances and showed this crowned child that he was acting contrary to custom and to law.

M. de Nesmond had three sons; the eldest, to whom was already promised the reversion of his father's appointment as President of the Chambers, was the candidate for the hand of Mademoiselle de Miramion. A private letter of the period thus describes him, "a quick temper like his father, witty enough, anxious to improve himself, benevolent, affectionate, unselfish, beloved in the courts of law, very just, and greatly influenced by the curé of Saint Nicolas." But as in addition to these merits he was handsome and exceedingly amiable, he had not much

* Of an illustrious family in the magistracy, brother of the venerable Bishop of Bayeux, whose memory is still honoured in this diocese, and father of Henri de Nesmond, archbishop of Toulouse.

difficulty in obtaining from the young lady the consent he had already received from all the family.

"On the 22nd June, 1660," says d'Hozier in the French Peerage, "Mademoiselle Marie Marguerite de Beauharnais de Miramion married at Paris Messire Guillaume de Nesmond, Chevalier, Lord of Saint Dizan, King's Counsellor, Master of Requests." Madame de Miramion gave her daughter on her marriage all her family jewels, all her father's fortune, which was considerable, and besides, the interest of this fortune which she had allowed to accumulate during fourteen years, and which had produced an enormous sum.

Two such pious and charitable persons could not be really happy without the participation of the poor. Mademoiselle de Miramion, inspired by her mother, refused the rich presents that M. de Nesmond wished to make her, and proposed that instead of buying new jewels he should give a thousand louis (twenty-four thousand francs) to the poor of Paris; this was accepted with pleasure by all the family, and immediately carried into effect.

A few days afterwards the newspaper of the day announced the news in these terms:

MUSE HISTORIQUE DU 26 JUIN 1660.

Mardi de Saint Jean l'antiveille,
Miramion jeune merveille
Et de biens ayant un grand fond
Epousa Monsieur de Nesmond;
Nesmond, le maître des requêtes,
Et fils d'une des bonnes têtes
Et d'aussi grand entendement
Qu'il en soit dans le parlement;

Et dont la bonne renommée
Par tout l'univers est semée.
Ledit Nesmond, amoureux
Autant profus et généreux.
Que plein d'esprit et de sagesse,
Fit un présent à sa maitresse,
En titre de futur époux
Outre les bagues et bijoux,
Gants parfumés et babioles,
De quatre ou cinq mille pistoles
Dont à l'hôpital général
Cette belle au cœur libéral,
En bonnes actions fertile,
En envoya, ce dit-on, mille.

On the other hand, Madame de Miramion wished on this occasion to found a useful and durable charity which she had long contemplated. Often when visiting the Hôtel-Dieu, she had remarked that priests were mixed up in the wards with common and even improper persons. The sanctity of their character, which she considered with the eyes of faith, appeared to her to be thus exposed to contempt, and she consequently formed the project of creating a private ward for sick priests.

It was this generous idea that she now resolved on carrying into effect. But as this charity was difficult and expensive to establish, she went to consult the Président de Lamoignon, who was of great help to her in the undertaking. Following his advice, she only gave at first the sum necessary for founding two beds, and afterwards made a collection among her family and friends. As no one refused her, she soon raised enough to found ten other beds, with an attendant to

do all the work of the ward; and this foundation, of which she alone had the initiative, subsisted until the Revolution.

Immediately after the marriage of her daughter, Madame de Miramion had the regret of seeing her obliged to leave home, to go and live with her husband's parents. This new separation was exceedingly painful to her. She experienced all that a mother must always suffer, in seeing the child to whom she has devoted her whole existence, leave her to follow a husband, who was yesterday a stranger to her, and is to-day the sole disposer of her happiness. But concealing her own sadness in order not to increase that of Madame de Nesmond, she herself conducted her to her new home, and, on leaving her, said:

"Your first duty after God, my dear child, must be to your husband. Gentleness and kindness will win and retain his affection. I wish you to love me, my dear daughter, but you ought to love him more; duty and religion oblige you to give him the first place in your heart. He will urge you from affection, and perhaps from political necessity, to give yourself up to the world by throwing yourself into the vortex of dissipation; resist courageously: he will esteem you all the more, and will certainly not love you the less for it. It is the false excuse of a great number of young wives, who are fond of dress and pleasure, and say 'that they go to the theatre only to please their husbands.'"

She then rendered her an account of her guardianship, wishing that the young wife should henceforth manage her fortune herself. Madame de Nesmond

was not quite fifteen, but her capacity was in advance of her age; and the education she had received had developed her natural abilities. The family of M. de Nesmond were aware of this, and consented to her mother's wish. Madame de Miramion came herself and had shelves placed in her daughter's boudoir, so as to arrange her papers and prepare her account-book, on which she inscribed the poor, as the first article of expense.

In a few years she taught her to administer her large fortune and her household with a prudent yet liberal economy which gave her a position of the highest esteem and consideration in the world—a position which she maintained to the end of her life.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADAME DE MIRAMION PERPETUAL SUPERIORESS OF THE SISTERS OF SAINT GENEVIEVE.

1660—1663.

"Who can find a virtuous woman? her price is above rubies."
Prov.

I.

AFTER having married her daughter according to her wishes, and having insured her happiness by every means that maternal tenderness could suggest, Madame de Miramion, free from all domestic cares, considered that henceforward she ought to think of nothing but the improvement of her own soul.

Giving herself up therefore to that deep love of God which had always inclined her to love solitude, contemplation, and penance, she fell back on her old idea of going into a convent, and becoming a Carmelite nun.

This holy house of Carmel, whose rich chapel and imposing ceremonies had fascinated her in her youth, now attracted her by its austerities, its virtues, and the precious friendships she already had formed there.

M. Cousin, in his charming history of Madame de Longueville, has shown us what this Carmelite monastery, in the Rue Saint Jacques, was in the seventeenth century; and through the peep thus given us of this celebrated convent we get a glimpse of the religious life of that period. His description brings out in a strong light one of the peculiar features of that time; that is to say, the tie which, through community of religious feeling, united worldly society to that of the cloister. There were many daughters of noble houses who, under the influence of strong faith and love, preferred voluntary poverty to all the splendours of the Court, and Carmel to Versailles.

The queen, the princesses, and other pious ladies were in continual relations with this convent, and constantly went there to seek advice or consolation.

Among Madame de Miramion's best friends at the Carmelites, we must reckon their venerable prioress, the Mother Agnes de Jésus-Maria (Mademoiselle de Bellefond), the friend of Madame de Maintenon, she whose talent has been so extolled by Bossuet and Madame de Sévigné. But in order to appreciate all the energy, nobleness, and delicacy of her character, it required a combination of circumstances such as are fortunately rare. The long struggle of Mademoiselle d'Epernon with her family, and the desire of tearing away Mademoiselle de Lavallière from the Court to purify her in the penances of Carmel, are instances of our meaning. It was then that this humble servant of God gave vent to those touching and persuasive words which are revived in several of Bossuet's letters. But in general she was only remarkable for an air of sin-

gular distinction, perfect gentleness, and great accuracy of judgment.

Full of confidence in and respect for the advice of such an estimable friend, it was to her that Madame de Miramion first confided her project of becoming a nun.

The mother Agnes, far from approving of it, dissuaded her as much as possible; but advised her nevertheless to leave it entirely to the judgment and decision of her director, and the wise counsel of M. Vincent. "It was impossible to go wrong in following his advice," says Bossuet, "for he never preached what he did not practise."

Following this recommendation, Madame de Miramion went and consulted, first MM. du Festal and M. Vincent, and then the mother Eugénie and the Président de Lamoignon. All of them dissuaded her from carrying out her project, assuring her that her quick and penetrating mind, and great capacity for business, ought not to be shut up in the cloister.

In the face of such unanimity of opinion, coming from such devoted and enlightened friends, Madame de Miramion gave up the idea of taking the veil. But although she resigned herself through obedience to remain in the world, she resolved at least to live in it in all the austerities of the cloister. Indeed, having learned some days afterwards that twenty-eight nuns of Picardy, whose convent had been ruined and destroyed by the war, were perishing from want in the streets of Paris, she received them into her house and provided for all their wants; serving them herself, sharing in their prayers and pious readings, and trans-

forming her house into a convent, until she had found the means of placing them in other monasteries, or sending them back to their families; this took more than six months.

It was at this period, and on account of these poor nuns about whom she busied herself continually, that Madame de Miramion became acquainted with Madame Scarron, that beautiful widow who, under the name of Marquise de Maintenon, was later to occupy such a high position at the Court of Louis XIV.

Madame Scarron,* who had just lost her husband, and was left a widow at four-and-twenty, without family or fortune, had retired to the Convent of the *Hospitalières*, near the Place Royale, where her relative, the Maréchale d'Aumont, had a furnished room which she lent her. It was there she lived in peace and retirement, occupying herself with devotional books and good works, when Madame de Miramion saw her for the first time, and was charmed with her grace and beauty.

The Queen-mother having soon learned in what poverty, and at the same time with what dignity, the grand-daughter of Agrippa d'Aubigné, the faithful friend of Henri IV., was living, continued to Madame Scarron the pension she had paid to her husband, and

* Françoise d'Aubigné, born at Niort in 1636, daughter of Constant d'Aubigné, Baron de Surimeau, and of Jeanne de Cardillac, married, in 1658, to Paul Scarron, a literary man, celebrated for his wit and infirmities; she became a widow in 1660, Marquise de Maintenon in 1690; married privately to the king in 1684, and died at Saint Cyr in 1719.

even increased it by a fourth part; which allowed her to have an apartment of her own:* but she gave a quarter to the poor; "and at all times of her life, her economy made her rich."†

Madame Scarron was then wonderfully beautiful, but as, unfortunately for herself, it was at an advanced age that her elevation drew all eyes upon her, we only know her when she had become Madame de Maintenon. We think of her with her soft brown silk dress and black head gear. Her best known portrait, that in which Mignard painted her as Sainte Françoise Romaine, when she was sixty years of age, has a noble and dignified expression, but at the same time a sad and fretful look, which contributes to fix her thus in our imagination. Thoroughly to appreciate her beauty one ought to have known her young, as Madame de Miramion did. Happy are those whose likenesses are perpetuated with all the charms of youth and grace and beauty; posterity is always more indulgent to them on that account. Some of her girlish letters, and some souvenirs of her contemporaries alone allow us to have a glimpse of her as she was at that period; it is true that they represent her to us as a charming person, full of grace, wit and gaiety, as well as of judgment, prudence and reason. An oval face, chesnut hair, a very white skin, black eye-brows, and very long eye-lashes, brown almost black eyes, almond shaped, which were both soft and brilliant, regular and refined features, an elegant and noble carriage, and very beautiful shoulders, made her a person of rare distinction and remarkable

* Rue des Tournelles, near Ninon de Lenclos.

† Mademoiselle d'Aumale.

beauty. It is thus that she is represented in the portraits of Mignard * and Petitot,† and it was thus that Madame de Miramion saw her in the Convent of the *Hospitalières*, when she formed with her those first relations of charity which mutual affection and esteem kept up, and which the piety of Madame de Maintenon rendered more intimate afterwards.

II.

THERE never was a period in France since the reign of Saint Louis, more celebrated in the annals of religion, than the first half of the seventeenth century. Never had there sprung up at one time so many charitable institutions, and so many works of piety. Madame de Miramion took interest in them all. There was, however, one which appeared to her more important than all the rest, because it not only relieved bodily sufferings, but tended more than any other to the salvation of souls and the glory of God. In a word, it was the work of the Propagation of the Faith, which enlisted her special sympathies, and which she desired to extend over the whole surface of the globe, but particularly in India and China.

* A full length likeness of Madame Scarron at four-and-twenty, painted by Mignard, and coming from the house which belonged to Madame de Maintenon, at Fontainebleau, is now by inheritance the property of the author, and Niort, the birth-place of Madame de Maintenon, has a portrait of her which is exactly similar.

† The Duc de Noailles, in his history of Madame de Maintenon, has given a likeness of her, engraved from a miniature of Petitot, and this likeness also resembles that of Mignard.

For more than a century the religion of Jesus Christ had been preached in the most distant kingdoms of the East. It had, above all, made great progress in China and Japan, where it had been cemented by the blood of martyrs. The Fathers of the Company of Jesus had taken a large share in this the highest work of charity; and it seemed as if Saint François Xavier had merited for them the peculiar graces which attended their labours. A great many conversions had already taken place; but as the Christian religion was still exposed to violent persecution, the European priests, who were easily recognised, were imprisoned, martyred, or exiled, and the new converts, left to themselves, relapsed into idolatry. The only remedy for so great an evil was to have bishops on the spot, who could make priests among the neophytes of the country.

Father Alexandre de Rhodes, a Jesuit celebrated for his devotedness to the cause of religion, after having exercised his ministry for a long time in Tonquin, had returned to Europe in 1653, to bring this proposal before the notice of the pope, but it had not been favourably received.

Some years afterwards, several French ecclesiastics of great eminence, at whose head was the Abbé Pallu* (that young theologian, Madame Bonneau's nephew, with whom Madame de Miramion and her brothers had been brought up), went to Rome to offer themselves to the pope to go as simple missionaries to India and

* He was the son of a counsellor of the Presidial Court of Tours, and his family were exceedingly pious. Three of his brothers were Jesuits, and three of his sisters nuns; and he himself was then a canon of the church of Saint Martin at Tours.

China, and the holy father was so touched with their spirit of sacrifice, that he not only accorded them the authorisation they asked for, but moreover conferred upon three of them the title of bishop and apostolic vicar. He selected the Abbé Pallu especially for the episcopal dignity, and had him consecrated in his presence and at his expense, with great pomp at Rome, under the title of Bishop of Heliopolis, by his Eminence the Cardinal Antonio, head of the congregation of the Propagation of the Faith.

The two other apostolical vicars chosen to accompany Mgr. of Heliopolis in China, were the Abbé de la Mothe-Lambert,* who was consecrated at Paris, under the title of Bishop of Bérinthe, and the Abbé Cotolandi,† Bishop of Metellopolis, who received the mitre at Aix in Provence, and then came to Paris to join his two friends.

Madame de Miramion, full of admiration for these future martyrs for the faith, undertook all the expense of the consecration of M. de la Mothe-Lambert, whose family she knew very well. This ceremony which she caused to be celebrated in the Church of the Visitation, was magnificent, and attracted all the magistracy of Paris.

Thinking then, that the silence and solitude of the country would suit the newly made bishops better than the tumult of Paris, so that they might consider with

* Pierre de la Mothe-Lambert was a counsellor at the Court of Rouen, when he sent in his resignation and took orders. He died as apostolic vicar, in China.

† Ignace Cotolandi, *Curé* of Sainte Madeleine of Aix, whose zeal was extraordinary, and his piety most austere.

their missionaries the best means of ensuring the success of so great an undertaking, she placed at their disposal the château of La Couarde, which she possessed at about ten leagues from the town.

The large fortune, and above all the well-known zeal of Madame de Miramion, permitted them to accept her offer without hesitation. The three prelates went and settled themselves at La Couarde, accompanied by twenty other ecclesiastics, and spent nearly eighteen months in her house, during which time she provided for all their wants, wishing that they should only have to occupy themselves with religious affairs.

It was from Madame de Miramion's country house, and with abundant proofs of her kindness and good wishes, that these worthy messengers of the Word of God started in 1660, gladly giving up the joys of home, and the advantages of their native land, to brave death and every kind of torture, in the hopes of converting some poor pagans to the knowledge of the God of truth, of charity, and of peace.

The beginning of this journey was exceedingly unfortunate; the vessel that had been chartered at a great expense in Holland, to carry the missionaries to India, foundered in going out of the port, but before they had gone on board.

The fond hopes that Madame de Miramion had entertained, the large sums she had collected with so much difficulty for the execution of this project, all were wrecked at a blow; and now she was compelled to take fresh steps, and beg for fresh help. An ordinary person would have despaired or been cast down by

these misfortunes. "But the Christian soul, sustained by the spirit of faith, is encouraged even in the midst of difficulties, because it knows that God supports, loves, and ever assists those who put their trust in Him."*

Sorrowful, but not cast down, Madame de Miramion went to the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, with whom she was on intimate terms, and who had powerfully contributed to the success of this work both by her high position in society, and by the inexhaustible resources of her benevolence.

The Duchesse d'Aiguillon,† niece of the Cardinal de Richelieu, by her beauty, grace, and wit, had long been considered the ornament and the principal charm of the brilliant receptions at the Palais-Cardinal and the Château de Ruel. But since her uncle's death she had lived in great retirement in the palace of the Petit Luxembourg, where her sweetness and affability attracted all the authors, literati, and men of eminence, who since the departure of Madame de Montausier, no longer met at the Hôtel de Rambouillet.

There, disabused of the vanities and deceitful follies of the world, she passed her days in distributing the riches which she no longer cared to enjoy. And it was without flattery that Fléchier ‡ was able to say, in speaking of her charity:

"Shall I reckon up the incredible sums which she

* Saint François de Sales.

† Marie de Wignerod, daughter of Richelieu's sister, widow of Antoine de Beauvoir-du-Roure, de Combalet, created Duchesse d'Aiguillon, in 1638, died in 1675.

‡ Funeral oration of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon.

distributed at different times? the endowments she made in different places? I should weary your imagination and your memory, if I undertook to relate one half of the labour and variety of her ingenious and indefatigable charity. I will confine myself to the statement that zeal for the faith had always the largest share, and that the conversion of sinners was the motive and ordinary result of her almsgiving."

On learning of the shipwreck which had swallowed up the vessel and all the hopes she had formed for the salvation of so many erring souls, Madame d'Aiguillon exclaimed:

"I acknowledge, Lord, the truth of what Thou hast said in Thy Gospel, that after we have done our best we are but unprofitable servants. Thou knowest better than we do in what Thy glory consists; our duty is to submit to Thy holy will. It was Thy work; Thou wilt accomplish it when the time and the hour that Thou hast marked for it are come. We had endeavoured to send by sea labourers for Thy vineyard; Thou hast shut this road, but Thou canst open another; and even while we adore the severity of Thy judgments, we hope and believe in Thy mercy."

Thus encouraging and strengthening each other, Madame d'Aiguillon and Madame de Miramion redoubled their zeal to furnish the poor missionaries with new means of transport. And God, after having tried their faith, recompensed their fidelity and submission by a success which far surpassed their expectation.

Some months later this evangelical expedition set out on its long journey by land, and in spite of

many hindrances arrived safely at its destination. Unfortunately, M. Cotolandi, bishop of Metellopolis, whose health was always delicate, died from the effects of this exhausting journey, on arriving on the coast of Bengal. But the bishop of Héliopolis and the bishop of Bérinthe arrived at Siam in good health. Soon, indeed, thanks to the supplies of all kinds which were sent them continually by these ladies, they were able to found in this town a seminary which became one of the most flourishing in the East, and afterwards served as a nucleus for other missions.

Madame de Miramion rendered them all kinds of services, supplying them with medicine, books, ornaments for their churches, objects of piety, etc., etc.: and had all parcels made up and sent from her own house. Even without the ties of friendship and family which existed between her and the bishop of Heliopolis, she would have been equally disposed to serve the humblest missionary from her fervent desire for God's glory, and for the good of souls.*

Thus what the Holy Spirit has said of the virtuous woman, was accomplished in her; her value was felt from afar, and her works were made known to the ends of the earth. For her zeal transported her in spirit beyond the seas for the conversion of the heathen; and if she could not go herself, she sent others in her stead.

As long as there will be missionaries in China, and that the heathens will be there converted to the catholic Faith, they ought to look upon her as their

* Choisy.

first benefactress and spiritual mother; for during her whole life, by her energy, zeal, and liberality, she became the principal supporter of the work of the Propagation of the Faith.

III.

BUT while her thoughts and her hopes travelled far away over the sea, and while she was ever preparing fresh paths for those apostolical men who went forth to conquer new kingdoms for Jesus Christ, Madame de Miramion did not forget her own country. She saw with pain how many souls around her were being lost through the general corruption of morals, and determined to contrive some means of bringing back to God these wandering hearts by opening to them a way for repentance.

The king's long minority and the troubles inseparable from civil war had allowed disorder and licentiousness to increase to a frightful extent. In spite of the peace, vice and disorder showed themselves openly in the streets without any one daring to oppose it. The police, in spite of various noisy conflicts, had indeed endeavoured to shut up in prison some of the most scandalous of the women; but these scenes of violence had not obtained any satisfactory or permanent result.

In the face of such flagrant immorality Madame de Miramion, whose special gift was a boundless charity which sought mainly to save souls, resolved to open a refuge where fallen and repentant women could be received with Christian gentleness and indulgence, and

raised from the depths of sin to a state of penitence and purity. Had not our Lord Himself said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her?"

This idea was at that time new, and appeared almost impossible of execution; but Madame de Miramion was determined to make the trial, and at her own expense.

She took a house in the Faubourg St. Antoine, and with the permission of the magistrates, brought there seven or eight fallen women who were willing to exchange their life of sin for something better. The care of them was given to two of the grey sisters who undertook the task of quelling these violent natures, and afterwards of winning them over by gentleness and Christian love. Every day Madame de Miramion herself went to instruct them and to speak to them of God as she so well knew how to speak. But her delicate tact made her always seize on the most favourable moment for making an impression on them and giving them a horror of vice; for it may well be said of Madame de Miramion that, "she opened her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue was the law of kindness."

Instead of giving them the common uniform dress of the hospitals, she had them neatly clothed according to their condition. Their food was good and abundant. She allowed only the insolent and insubordinate to be punished, and in general her great means of persuasion were to love and to pray with them and for them; well knowing that affection is the greatest power that can be employed, and one whi...

succeeds when all others fail. Several of them reflected seriously on their past conduct, and manifested a repentance which was as sincere as it was lasting. For them she was full of loving care; saying that if innocency be worthy of respect, repentance is so likewise. She gave them the means of settling themselves honorably in life, and helped them to persevere in the right way. The incorrigible were given up to the authorities, who replaced them by others, and this house thus rendered the greatest service to public morality. However humble it may have been, it has the merit of being the foundation stone, courageously laid, of all the establishments which the Père Eudes and others have since raised up with the same object and intention.

One day, a lady having said to her that she was taking a great deal of trouble to be useful to people who were often ungrateful, she replied:

"Ah! my dear, I have received many more graces from God than these poor people have received services from me, and it is a great mercy that He will grant me these little opportunities of appeasing His justice."

But the fear of meeting with ingratitude, or the annoyances she often experienced, never prevented her from doing all the good she possibly could; and of this the rest of her life is a brilliant proof.

IV.

SAINT PAUL has said, "If any one will not work, neither let him eat." It would appear that Madame

de Miramion had this precept constantly in her mind, so fully did she occupy every moment of her life, and so active and indefatigable was her charity. Like the virtuous woman in the Bible, "she did not eat the bread of idleness." We have seen her at first "stretch out her hand to the poor, and reach forth her hands to the needy." We are now going to find her "considering a field and buying it, with the fruit of her hands planting a vineyard."

Many years before, in the hopes of finding a remedy for the gross ignorance which prevailed in the country districts, she wished to found a little community, whose object (in remembrance of the good her first governess had done her) should be to instruct children and assist the poor. But the education of her daughter, her marriage, and other occupations had hitherto prevented her from realising this scheme.

However, in the beginning of the year 1661 she carried out part of her project in spite of all obstacles. In order to do so, however, she was obliged to leave her brothers whom she loved so dearly, and this was not a small sacrifice. But when the service of God was in question, nothing could stop her. She left them her house in the Rue Saint Antoine and went to live in a much smaller one in the same street, with some pious young women whom she had formed into a community under the name of the *Holy Family*, wishing to honour the laborious and charitable life of Jesus Christ.

As soon as Madame de Miramion was settled with her sisters she began to take her meals with them, to learn to bleed and to dress wounds, and to make

all the drugs and ointments which were of daily use. She set them the example of submission to the rules which she had had drawn up by M. du Festal and approved by M. de Vincent, a very few days before the death of this holy man.*

The little community was hardly established when the Abbé du Festal, who was very old, died. Madame de Miramion regretted him sincerely; he had been her director for fourteen years, and had always advised her prudently, and been of the greatest assistance to her. She chose as her new confessor the Abbé Ferret, Curé of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, Doctor of Theology, Grand Vicar of Paris, Superior of the Carmelites, the person whom she had already selected as superior of her little community.

The Abbé Ferret, one of the most important and esteemed members of the metropolitan clergy, was at the same time superior of another community which had been founded in his parish thirty years before by Mademoiselle de Blosset under the name of Sisters of

* Vincent de Paul, born in 1576, died on the 27th of September, 1660, and his funeral took place with great pomp in the church of Saint Lazare on the 28th at mid-day, "in the presence of the Prince de Conti, the Papal Nuncio, Piccolomini, six bishops, the Presidents de Nesmond and de Mesmes, and a great number of clergy. There was also present the Princesse de Conti, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, and a crowd of ladies of rank, those particularly that M. Vincent had for some time past assembled each Wednesday to assist the sick of the Hôtel Dieu," says Bossuet, who was an eye-witness of the ceremony; among them were Madame de Miramion and her pious friends. On the 16th of June, 1737, the Pope Clement XII. published a bull for the canonization of Vincent de Paul.

Sainte Généviève, on account of the spot where they lived, at the foot of the mountain where lay the relics of the holy shepherdess.*

This community had been instituted pretty much for the same purpose as that of the Holy Family, that is to say, for the instruction and relief of the poor; but the revenues of this convent were so small that they were barely sufficient to keep them alive. M. Ferret, knowing Madame de Miramion's kindness and disinterestedness, described to her the distress of these poor nuns, and entreated her to take some interest in their fate. It was not difficult to touch her heart, and his eloquent words moved her to tears. He then proposed to her to unite her rising community to that of the Sisters of Sainte Généviève, assuring her that it was the only means of founding a useful and permanent establishment.

Madame de Miramion, whose only object was to do good, without desiring the vain glory of being the foundress of a new Order, accepted this proposal with joy, and united her sisters to those of this little convent, under the general name of "Sisters of Sainte Généviève."

The house in which she had established the Holy

* We read in the life of Saint Vincent de Paul that the Sisters of Sainte Généviève, before forming themselves into a community, went to consult M. Vincent, whom they looked upon as a saint and a most enlightened and prudent man, and that he said to them: "God will make use of you to give a new association to His Church; our Lord will be glorified, and your neighbours will be greatly benefited." Prophetic words, which time and Providence have confirmed.

Family, Rue Saint-Antoine, was too small to contain two communities. Obliged, therefore, to leave it, she desired at least to be nearer to her daughter, and hastened to buy two houses next to each other which were for sale in Madame de Nesmond's neighbourbourhood, near the church of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet.*

These houses, which occupied a considerable space on the quay of la Tournelle, were only separated from the hôtel inhabited by the de Nesmond family by a building belonging to the Bishop of Bayeux, brother of the Président de Nesmond, who sold it some years later to Madame de Miramion.

The Hôtel de Nesmond, built in a recess, at the bottom of a court, and flanked by two wings, was at the corner of the Rue des Bernardins and of the Quai de la Tournelle, opposite the bridge of the Bishops' palace.† And, strange to say, after two centuries, the house which now occupies this site has still inscribed in gold letters upon black marble over the gateway,

* She bought these houses from a person named Desgranges for fifty thousand pounds.

† "The first remarkable house to be met with on the Quai de la Tournelle, on leaving the Rue des Bernardins, is the Hôtel de Nesmond. There are few mansions in Paris which have so often changed their name as this one. Formerly it was called Hôtel de Tyron, then de Bar, de Montpensier, du Pin, and at last de Nesmond, when MM. de Nesmond, who held the highest positions in the Parliament, became its proprietors and gave it their name. This family having become extinct in the beginning of this century, the hôtel was sold to the late Blondy, a famous opera dancer. (Taken from the *Description of Paris* by Piganiol de la Force.)

the denomination "Hôtel de Nesmond," which it formerly bore. Perhaps it is in memory of the origin attributed to this inscription by the malicious Duc of Saint-Simon in his Memoirs.

"Madame la Présidente de Nesmond,"* he says, "was the first lady of her position who wrote upon her door, Hôtel de Nesmond. People laughed at it and were shocked at it, but the title remained and served as a model to all those of every description with which since then Paris has been inundated."

It was, therefore, near to her daughter and her dearest friends (Mademoiselle de Lamoignon and the Présidente de Nesmond) that Madame de Miramion came to found a second time this community of the Sisters of Sainte Geneviève, of which she was elected perpetual superioress; the poor, in their gratitude to her, called the Sisters *Miramionnes.*

According to the constitution of the Order drawn up by M. Ferret and M. Vincent de Paul, the first object of these nuns was to open free schools for girls and also to form schoolmistresses for the country. They were likewise to assist the poor and sick, to bleed, to dress wounds, and to give medicines gratuitously. Their habit consisted of a black woollen dress, and a white linen wimple with a mob cap of the same material covered with a black hood; but their hair was not cut.

Their religious obligations were to say the Little

* Madame de Miramion's daughter, whom he did not like because she was pious and a favourite with Madame de Maintenon, whom he detested.

Office of the Virgin every day in common, to make an hour's meditation and prayer at two o'clock in the morning and at two in the afternoon ; to meet together once a week to accuse themselves of their faults in the presence of the Superioress ; and to make a retreat of eight days once a year.

It was by observing these rules very strictly herself that Madame de Miramion contributed so greatly to its establishment. Her humility, courage, and kindness encouraged every one ; and not one of the nuns would have dared to complain after seeing the Superioress, who had been brought up in such comfort and luxury, wait upon herself, get up without a fire in winter, and accept of no dispensation or indulgence whatever.

After having paid all the expenses of the purchase and furnishing of this new house, she gave besides to the community, as an endowment for the maintenance of twelve nuns, a sum of seventy thousand francs, with only one condition : that, if of equal merit, young ladies of noble birth should be admitted in preference to others. But she stipulated that in the event of the community's choosing to change their constitution and to become cloistered, this endowment should pass entirely to the General Hospital of Paris.

Unfortunately the numerous works she had to superintend, and the great difficulties she had to overcome in uniting into one these two communities, had not been accomplished without great fatigue and physical exhaustion ; and although Madame de Miramion never complained of her health, it was easy to see how much it had given way. Her daughter's

anxiety was roused, and she ended by extracting from her the avowal of an ailment from which she had long suffered in secret. This was constant sickness, which since Christmas Day, 1661, caused her to throw up all the food she took, except a piece of dry bread which she ate in the morning.

Madame de Nesmond, uneasy at the progress which the cancer (from which her mother had suffered for eight years) seemed to make, and attributing to it this new indisposition, sent for the most eminent physicians: M. Daquin, first physician to the King—"a great courtier, miserly and greedy," says Saint-Simon; Fagon, the Queen's physician; and Vésou, of whom Madame de Sévigné speaks as "a much-respected authority." But all the remedies they advised were employed without effect. M. Vésou, who was the physician in ordinary to the community, then advised her not to eat meat, but to confine herself to eggs, vegetables, and meat soups. She followed this advice, which, without curing her, gave some alleviation to her sufferings.

"This ailment lasted for sixteen years," says Choisy, "without her appearing to be much weakened by it. She went on working as usual, and was always full of ardour when the glory of God or the service of her neighbour required it."

V.

Too much occupied henceforward with the care of her new community to watch over the House of Refuge for the Penitents which she had created in the Rue

Saint Antoine, Madame de Miramion thought it would be better to close it. She saw the necessity of this step, but the thought made her unhappy, and the success which she had obtained, together with the services she had rendered to those erring souls during more than two years, could not console her at the bare idea of giving it up.

It is the glory of humanity that some souls are thus formed; they suffer more than others, but their sufferings are fertile, and all the greatest works of Christian charity are the fruit of their pains.

By dint of thinking and praying, Madame de Miramion found an expedient which, while it gave her the means of continuing her work, allowed her to open on a larger scale and at the expense of the public treasury, that which she had begun in a humble way at her own cost. This was to make an appeal to the generosity of the king, as well as to private charity. However painful the exertion might be to her, she resolved nevertheless to make the attempt. She mentioned her plan to the Président de Lamoignon, who, always well disposed in favour of charitable works, greatly approved of it, and undertook to have it brought before several ladies of rank, whose piety and charity were well known to him.

A few days afterwards a numerous meeting of ladies, among whom were the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, Madame de Farinvilliers, and Madame de Traversay, was held to deliberate on the subject at the house of M. Mazure, Doctor of the Sorbonne, and Curé of Saint Paul. At the first idea of a House of Refuge for the Preserva- of Young Girls, all those ladies found the plan excel-

lent, but on going into the details, they considered that its execution presented so many difficulties that it was useless to think of it. Madame de Miramion arrived just at the moment when they had come to this conclusion; her zeal took fire at once, and inspired her with such touching and persuasive words, that every one present adopted her views, confessing that the spirit of God had spoken by her mouth. However (like those of Saint Vincent de Paul, her first director) her speeches were never long. The heart does not declaim; her talent and her eloquence found expression in her charity; and her precepts, like those of Saint John, might be summed up in one short sentence: Love one another.

Happy at having been the first to found a Refuge which she had always so greatly desired for the repentant, she offered to give at once ten thousand francs to this charity, and to occupy herself carefully with its direction. Madame d'Aiguillon, Madame de Farinvilliers, and Madame de Traversay, following her good example, gave as much as she had done, and the contract for the endowment was drawn out in their name. They bought some ground in Rue Coppeau, near the Hospital of la Pitié, upon which two large buildings were erected, separated from each other by a court. In one were placed all the women sent by the authorities * to the House of Correction, and as it adjoined the hospital, it was called the "Refuge de la Pitié." In the other were received those who, wearied of the shameful and miserable life they had led, came of

* The Provost of Paris, and the Judges of the Châtelet or of Parliament.

their own accord to beg to be admitted. It was called "Sainte Pélagie," which name it has retained to the present day.

Madame de Miramion, after having drawn up the rules of the establishment, went to live there for a time to enforce their observance. Then when order had been regularly established, the administrators of the General Hospital, at her request, undertook the direction of this house. Three years afterwards, in 1665, the king, informed of the services rendered by this refuge, confirmed it as a permanent establishment.

Thus was founded in perpetuity an asylum which the charity and zeal of one noble-hearted woman had opened to repentance.

Were we to recapitulate the many important charities which were founded by Madame de Miramion, and that in a very few years, nothing would seem more wonderful than her power of giving her mind to such a variety of works, each of which would have sufficed to occupy and render illustrious the life of any other person.

But she possessed that generous and universal charity which never tires of doing good, or thinks it has done enough; which gives much, and always gives joyfully; which refuses no toil, often anticipates what is desired, and never fails in time of need.

She looked upon her fortune as a sacred deposit, to be spent with fidelity as in God's sight. She felt that to whom much is given, much will be required; and that the greater the riches entrusted to her, the larger should be her proportion of alms.

CHAPTER IX.

CHARITABLE WORKS OF MADAME DE MIRAMION. 1662—1670.

"All that is done for God is great."—*Madame de Miramion.*

I.

IN spite of the magnificence, splendour, and greatness of the beginning of the reign of Louis XIV., and of the order and wisdom with which his minister Colbert administered the finances, the year 1662 was one of the most cruel periods of dearth which Paris had ever experienced.

The king caused ovens to be built in the courts of the Tuileries, in order to alleviate the misery and famine by relief in kind, which he paid for out of his privy purse. But all was insufficient; the country was deserted, a great many poor were brought to the Hôtel Dieu who only lived for a few days, so great was their exhaustion, and who were so infected with sores and vermin that the priests of the Seminary of Saint Nicolas were obliged to bring them there themselves in boats, the boatmen refusing to do so.*

* History of Colbert, by M. Clément, 1846.

In a few days every place was crowded. The general hospital, which overflowed with patients, unable to meet such heavy expenses, was on the point of closing its doors in the very heart of the winter, and absolutely to cease to exist. M. de Lamoignon, who was governor of this hospital, came to confide his fears to Madame de Miramion, and spoke to her about it as a misfortune which appeared to be inevitable.

At the bare thought of an event which she considered as the greatest calamity which could befall the poorer classes, she did not hesitate to go again and solicit the charity of well-known friends.

Her first visit was to the Princess de Conti (Marie-Anne Martinozzi, niece of the Cardinal Mazarin), who united rare beauty with the greatest goodness, and whose piety and benevolence were well known to her.

She explained to her the critical position of the hospital in such a touching manner, that the princess, who was still more illustrious for her virtues than for her rank, promised to do all she could to save it, and begged her to come again the following day. Madame de Miramion certainly hoped on returning to receive a handsome donation. But what was her joy, her surprise, and her gratitude, when the princess placed in her hands a bank-note for a hundred thousand francs, saying to her, "Do not mention it, Madame. I am only too happy that God permits me to save the lives of so many people."

The Princess de Conti, like her sister the Duchesse de Longueville, who was then living in the most austere penance, gave largely to charitable purposes. That same year, 1662, having no more money, and

seeing that the misery was increasing, she gave to Mademoiselle de Lamoignon a necklace of pearls and precious stones which she sold for forty thousand crowns to feed the poor.* Three years later she wrote to her director:

9th January, 1665.

"WE are working for our poor in Berry, and I hope, if it please God to bless our endeavours, that we shall keep them from dying of hunger. I have not written to you until now the details of the alms I give, because I did not think you desired it. I have only endeavoured to act according to your ideas, and as I thought you would have wished. I have given away nearly all this year's income, and there is very little remaining, that is to say ten thousand francs. I believe I have given altogether about six hundred thousand. But still the misery is very great. People are found dead of hunger; others in despair want to destroy themselves; and an infinite number would die of hunger if bread were not given them. There are no funds left in any hospital, therefore means must be found to feed them. For that it is necessary to go out begging, and to invent various expedients: those I have tried hitherto have succeeded very well, and I am very busy about it. But instead of doing this only for

* This necklace was bought by the King, who, however, respected the Princesse de Conti's secret. Inspired by this great example, private charity made unlooked-for sacrifices in money and jewels, and it is believed that Mademoiselle de Lamoignon distributed five hundred thousand francs in alms during this terrible famine.

God I talk about it, I like to be esteemed, I am tempted to vain-glory; in a word, I do quite wrong. The same thing often happens in the other opportunities which God gives me for helping my neighbour. I am often obliged to go to the Louvre, and I fear that this intercourse with the world, although with a good intention, may make me lose that precious familiarity with our Lord which He has given me."*

The letter, in which Madame de Conti opens her heart so frankly to her confessor, shows better than any praise can do what was the modesty, humility, and Christian virtues of this princess.

Madame de Miramion went and carried the bank-note of a hundred thousand francs to the president, who employed it for the most pressing wants of the hospital; and, thanks to the munificence of the Princess, this admirable establishment escaped ruin.

It was in 1656 and at St. Vincent de Paul's request, that the general hospital had been founded by letters patent stating that M. Vincent and his congregation of missionaries should have the temporal and spiritual direction of it, and the Sisters of Charity should take care of the sick. It was managed by twenty-five directors, at whose head were the Archbishop of Paris, the President of the Chambers, and the Procureur-general.

"Who does not know," says Fléchier, "that the establishment of a large hospital in this capital of the kingdom, which contains at the same time so much

* "Madame de Sablé," by M. Cousin.

luxury and so much misery, has been one of the greatest works of the age?

"Its utility was foreseen, and its importance had been recognized for some time; for before, it was next to impossible to discriminate between the necessitous poor and dissolute beggars. In administering relief it was difficult to know if one were relieving real want or merely keeping up idleness. The complaints and confused murmurs of the people rather excited indignation than pity. Wandering gangs of beggars were to be seen without any species of religion, asking for alms as their right, often stealing what they could not honestly obtain, simulating infirmities to attract public attention, and even forcing their way into the churches to trouble the devotion of the faithful by the indiscreet and untimely story of their wants and sufferings.

"People contented themselves with complaining of these disorders, which they believed to be not only difficult but almost impossible to remedy. Much prudence was necessary to pave the way, much firmness to overcome all obstacles, a large fortune to provide the means, still greater piety and wisdom to establish order and discipline among men and women who were for the greater part bad and disorderly. Where were these qualities to be found save in the Duchesse d'Aiguillon?

"She was the heart and soul of this gigantic undertaking, encouraging some, soliciting others, and setting an example to all. She enlisted the interest and authority of the magistrates with the zeal of private

persons, and neglected nothing to complete the work she had so well begun."*

This general hospital,† originally founded to put an end to begging in the streets, was above all a refuge for old age, sickness, as well as for incurable infirmities.

Madame de Miramion, whose generosity had greatly contributed to the maintenance of this establishment, gave continual proofs of her interest in and devotedness to the work.

We may say in speaking of her charity as Fléchier did of Madame d'Aiguillon when alluding to this noble hospital:

"Vast and holy house, where God the Creator of poor and rich is honoured by the patience of the first and the charity of the second, may you remain, if it be possible, until the end of time, and be an eternal monument of the care and liberality of your first benefactress."

II.

THE whole of Madame de Miramion's life was so closely mixed up with the foundation and support of

* Funeral oration of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, by Fléchier.

† It was composed of four distinct houses:

1. *Sainte Marthe*, called *Scipion*, which served as steward's office, bakehouse, storeroom, larder, etc.

2. *Saint Denis*, called the *Salpêtrière*, devoted to incurable women of all ages.

3. The house of *Bicêtre*, for men.

The house of *la Pitié*, or the hospital properly so called, for the sick.

The whole generally contained seven thousand poor.

all the charities, whether public or private, of her time, that to relate it is inevitably to relate likewise the history of all the pious establishments of the seventeenth century, for there was not one of them in which she did not take some active part.

It was a new and singularly touching sight for Madame de Miramion's friends and family to watch this soul always seeking for some fresh good to do or some new duty to perform, and to see the energy of this delicate and sickly woman, whose actions seemed inspired by a supernatural strength.

They admired in silence her piety, faith, tenderness, and charity; and that wonderful courage and firmness which overcame all natural weakness. When she spoke it awoke fresh surprise. One would have said that she had passed her life not in action but in reading and meditation. But it was by the dying bed that her charity shone forth in all its lustre. She was like a mother near her child's sick couch. She exhorted them, not by long speeches which would have wearied them, but by short ejaculations which she allowed them the time to think over, such as:

"My God, Thy will be done, not mine!"

"God, my Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit, my health, and my life; I abandon myself to Thee, I love Thee, and I repent of not having always loved Thee as I ought."

She calmed their anxieties, and comforted them in their sufferings. Neither night-watches, fatigue, nor danger of infection could deter her if she felt she could be of use to one of her brethren or sisters in Jesus Christ.

But her parents and friends were always the first for whom she poured forth her unselfish charity.

About the end of the month of November, 1664, she was called upon to render this service to the father of her son-in-law, the Président de Nesmond, who had just been seized with erysipelas in the head. It was during the trial of the unfortunate Fouquet, who was being judged without appeal before the High Court of Parliament, and M. de Nesmond sat as second president among the judges of the Court of Appeal.

This trial, begun three years before, and whose long and protracted stages rendered it one of the most curious events of the period, then occupied everyone's attention, and was of absorbing interest to the higher classes of society.

Accused before the King at the very time he was giving to Louis XIV. and all his Court a splendid fête in his country house at Vaux, the ostentatious and frivolous Fouquet found himself a few days afterwards arrested and thrown into prison as being the cause of the disorder which then existed in the finances of the State. There is no doubt that the minister's defalcations were serious; but the disorders of that period and the example of others were a great excuse for him, and his amiable and generous character, his lively and brilliant wit, and his love of art and literature, had gained him many friends, who remained faithful to him even in his misfortunes. But the vanity and pride of the Superintendent, and the insolent luxury he displayed, had raised him up a host of enemies, who conspired secretly against him. From the very beginning of his

trial, the determination to ruin him was so evident, and the conduct of his enemies (several of whom were his judges) was so outrageous, that people would have sympathised in his cause even had he been more guilty than he really was.

Among his judges was M. de Pussort, uncle of the Président de Nesmond, and one of Fouquet's bitterest enemies. M. de Nesmond, who could have taken exception against him as judge, and had at first thought of doing so, did not carry out his intention. The remorse which this caused him was, it was said, the cause of the erysipelas which, flying to his head, immediately placed his life in danger. But as he seemed only anxious about the fate of the Superintendent,* and forgot his own position, his family charged Madame de Miramion to announce to him the approach of death and to prepare him for it.

The Président de Nesmond died a few days afterwards (November 29, 1664) in Madame de Miramion's arms, and with all the consolations of religion.

"It was said," says Conrart in his Memoirs, "that in his will he had desired his heirs to ask pardon for him from M. Fouquet and his family,† because he had voted against the exception that the Superintendent

* Fouquet was condemned by the greater number of his judges to the penalty of banishment; some of them had passed on him the sentence of death, but the King commuted the sentence into perpetual imprisonment. He was conveyed to the fortress of Pignerol, where he remained until his death in 1680.

† Madame Fouquet, his mother, *née* de Meaupou, who was seventy-two years of age, and Madeleine de Castille de Villemareuil, Fouquet's second wife.

had made of M. Voisin and M. de Pussort as his judges, saying he had given this opinion only to save their honour, and in consequence of the assurance they had given him that when the Court should have pronounced in their favour, they would withdraw of their own accord."

This is also confirmed by a letter from Madame de Sévigné to M. Arnaud de Pomponne, dated December 3, 1664, in which she writes:

"They say that M. de Nesmond declared when dying that his greatest regret was not to have challenged the appointment of the two judges; had he lived to the end of the trial he would have made amends for this fault, and he prayed to God earnestly to forgive him for having committed it."

The Memoirs of Conrart also mention that the Président de Lamoignon, brother of the Président de Nesmond's wife, had his nephew (son of the deceased President) appointed early the following morning in the presence of Président Lecoigneux and Président de Mesme. It had to be done with caution, however, on account of the eldest son of President Longueil de Maisons, who pretended to have a right to this position instead of M. de Nesmond. Thus the latter became *Président à mortier* of the Parliament of Paris, instead of and in the room of his father.

Madame de Nesmond, who had been for some time in bad health, died a few days after her husband.

"She had assiduously visited and assisted the poor of the parish of Saint Nicholas for more than thirty years; and at her death the Abbé Ferret desired Madame de Miramion to take charge of them in her

place. As she never refused to do anything which could be agreeable to God, she cheerfully added this employment to those which she had already."*

III.

SOME pious persons had feared that the two communities united by Madame de Miramion would not work well together. But God showed that this union was in accordance with His will by the peace and charity which reigned among all the sisters who, according to the expression in Holy Writ, were of one heart and one mind, "cor unum in anima una." By her influence she obtained, as an acknowledgment for the services rendered by this house, that the legal contract of union between the two communities should be definitively concluded in the presence and with the approbation of the Archbishop of Paris, M. Hardouin de Péréfixe†, and in 1668 this institution, thanks to her, was still further approved and confirmed by Monseigneur the Cardinal de Vendôme, Legate *à latere* of the Holy See in France.

The Sisters of Sainte Géneviève, on their side, had a lively sense of what they owed to Madame de Miramion. Their gratitude showed itself in every way, and one day they took it into their heads, without consulting her, to have a deed drawn up by a notary, by which they acknowledged her as their foundress and benefactress.

* Choisy. † On the 14th of September, 1665.

M. Ferret, their superior, approved of it; but Madame de Miramion, as soon as she heard of it, sent for a notary and declared that she renounced all these titles, which she did not deserve; that it was Mademoiselle de Blosset who had founded the Sisters of Sainte Géneviève, and that if she had rendered them any service, the glory was due to God alone, and that all she asked was a share in their prayers.

Under the direction of so humble and prudent a superioress, the community of the Miramionnes, as they were generally called, could not fail to prosper rapidly. Therefore, in spite of her humility, Madame de Miramion was obliged to acknowledge that good order and economy had already placed the establishment on a footing to support itself, and to live henceforth on its own resources. This was the end she had always hoped to attain. The future position of this house and the continuation of the work after her death had long been her greatest subject of anxiety; but seeing it so firmly established she was reassured, and only considered how she could ensure its extension, by obtaining for it an increase of income.

For this purpose she made the community (whom she wished gradually to substitute for herself) buy a third house contiguous to the two first, on the Quai de la Tournelle, and contributed ten thousand francs to help them in doing so. By this addition, a paying class of children was added to the two gratuitous ones which already existed, and this allowed the admission of three hundred poor children into the house. At the same time some nuns were also received, and they took in several lady boarders

whose dowries and annuities increased the revenues of the community.

In the midst of this success Madame de Miramion's humility was extreme. She never failed to accuse herself of her faults like the youngest sister of the community. It was a practice which she had established herself and which she always observed. She reflected on it beforehand with great attention, wrote down her faults, and read them in the presence of the whole chapter. One of these notes has been preserved, and will give an idea of the others.

"I accuse myself very humbly of my want of fidelity to grace, of my distractions, of my divided attention, of my want of recollection, of not having been exact in the time for prayer, of not having been sufficiently filled with the realization of the presence of God, and of not having offered all my actions to Him.

"I have not had sufficient charity for my neighbours; I have been impatient at useless visits.

"With respect to our community I feel myself guilty of the greater part of the faults which are here committed through my bad example. I have not been so exact as I might have been at assisting at the exercises. I have not had sufficient zeal for the spiritual good of the community. I have not shown sufficient gentleness, kindness, and forbearance to our sisters.

"I have spoken to them with too much haughtiness; I have felt impatient with some of them; I have acted against the light that God has given me, and sometimes I have not reproved them through cowardice

or weariness, and on account of the pain they give me when they have not done all I wished.

"When I had to speak to them I was not sufficiently sincere in asking from God the grace I required for doing it.

"I have not been obedient enough; I have done something without permission; I often follow my own will, and almost always do so in little common things.

"I hardly practise any mortification, and I feel outward pain from it; nor feel poverty, as I want for nothing.

"It appears to me that I arrange many things according to my own inclination; I do not know what it is to keep silence; I am proud and very pleased to be praised and loved.

"I have been pained and troubled about two matters, because people spoke against me and blamed my conduct. I was much pained at it, and that from pride, of which I am full."

This humility, zeal, and respect for the rule, joined to such great charity, did not fail to spread Madame de Miramion's reputation not only through Paris, but also in several neighbouring towns; and about the end of the year 1669, a community which had been long established at Amiens, sent two nuns charged to ask her advice upon the direction of their house. Madame de Miramion thought that practice and example were more profitable than theory. She kept them with her during more than a month, and sent them back so charmed with all they had seen and heard that a few weeks afterwards some

other sisters came to implore her, in the name of their superioress, to unite their community to that of the Sisters of Sainte Génevièvе, and to give them their habit and constitutions.

Madame de Miramion at first refused; but the Bishop of Amiens and M. de Chaveelin, the Intendant of Picardy, having joined their entreaties to those of the nuns, she consented. A few days afterwards she was at Amiens, where the union of the two communities took place according to established rules.

The nuns made their novitiate and profession under her own eye, and she only left Amiens after she had made them open schools, visit and attend to the sick, and in fact perform all the good works of her community. In order to ensure the continuation of this good direction, even after her departure, she left at the head of the convent two very superior nuns whom she had brought with her, and returned to Paris alone. But the cheering and blessings of all the inhabitants of Amiens accompanied her to the gates of the town, and the light of the bonfires they had made in her honour followed her still further.

Thus the liberality, the care, and above all the good example given by Madame de Miramion had brought forth fruit, and, in less than ten years, her community had become one of the most important and most popular of the religious and charitable establishments of Paris and the provinces.*

* Until the Revolution the prosperity and reputation of this community, both in Paris and the numerous provinces where it

had houses, went on increasing; and perhaps it had never been more flourishing nor its schools more useful than at the time when the suppression of all religious houses in 1790 destroyed the benevolent works of Madame de Miramion with the rest.

Since this dispersion, the Sisters of Sainte Géneviève have never been re-established; but children brought up by Madame de Miramion's sisters have at least transmitted her name to us, and several of our contemporaries have heard their grandmothers, in speaking of their girlhood, say joyously, "It was at the time I was at the Miramionnes'." Only thirty years back caps were still worn in the country called "à la Miramion," in remembrance of the hoods of black silk worn by these holy nuns.

CHAPTER X.

MADAME DE MIRAMION'S WRITINGS.

1670—1678.

"The spirit of God will be seen to reign in her heart, continually inspiring her with humility, mortification, and self-abnegation."—*Choisy.*

IN the spring of the year 1670 the King, whose armies had been everywhere victorious, made a royal progress through his new conquests in Flanders, accompanied by all his Court. Nothing can be imagined more magnificent than this journey. M. de Lauzun commanded the King's escort, which was composed of his household, his *gendarmerie*, and his musketeers. The troops were in splendid uniforms; and the Court had never been so brilliant. The King distributed gold by handfuls, and the charm with which he spoke greatly increased the value of his gifts.*

* Choisy's Memoirs.

They had hardly returned from this journey through Flanders, which had been one long and continued fête, when all at once that terrible news was echoed through France which the voice of Bossuet was soon to immortalize:

"Madame is dying! Madame is dead!"

In an instant the news spread from Saint Cloud to Versailles and from Versailles to Paris that Madame Henrietta of England, Duchess of Orleans, sister-in-law to the King of France, and the King of England's sister, had just died of poison.

She had drunk, it was said, a glass of chicory-water which had been presented to her by the Comptroller of her Household, M. de Purnon, the accomplice of the real author of the crime, the Chevalier de Lorraine, who was suspected of having sent the poison from Italy to revenge himself for the exile and imprisonment which he had brought upon himself by his guilty conduct towards the princess.

The terror, grief, and consternation of Madame de Miramion at the news of such a misfortune, and in the face of such suspicions, may be easily imagined.

Not that she doubted for one instant of her brother's complete innocence. She was as sure of him as of herself; but knowing how many intrigues, conspiracies, and crimes are plotted around persons of high birth, she might justly fear that M. de Purnon had been made the involuntary instrument of some horrible crime while performing a necessary duty.

Unfortunately, everything relating to this death,

which grieved the King all the more because it wounded him in his tenderest affections, was on that account buried in profound silence by all who desired to please him; so that the Abbé de Choisy, when writing the life of Madame de Miramion (the King and M. de Purnon being still alive), did not consider that he had the right to speak of the sad event.

Perhaps we should, like him, have passed it over in silence if the Duc de Saint-Simon, in his Memoirs, which are but too much thought of in an historical point of view, had not added the authority of a calumnious assertion to these public rumours.

Saint-Simon not only declares that the Princess Henrietta of England was poisoned, but also that M. de Purnon had owned the crime to the King.

This is a flagrant error, for besides its being impossible to believe that if the King had thus acquired the certainty of the guilt of the Chevalier de Lorraine he would have permitted him soon afterwards to come back to Court, and would afterwards have bestowed several favours upon him, the numerous proofs given that Madame was *not* poisoned, may be seen in the "Studies on Bossuet," by M. Floquet.* The letter written on the subject by Bossuet, who assisted her in her last moments, those of Guy Patin and others . . . . . † the post-

* Volume iii., p. 388.

† The account of the illness, death, and post-mortem examination by the Abbé Bourdelot, and that of Father Feuillet, who had been summoned to assist Madame before Bossuet.

mortem examination made with the greatest care in the presence of twelve surgeons and physicians, of the English Ambassador, and of all those by whom he chose to be accompanied . . . . . * all these documents (which show clearly that the death of this princess was owing to natural causes), sufficiently refute Saint-Simon's assertion and prove how necessary it is to be on one's guard against those striking dramas with which his Memoirs abound, and which too easily make an impression upon a credulous public."†

Personal malice and a love of the marvellous were in truth the only reasons for the general persuasion that Madame had been poisoned. Human nature would be worse than it is were it as common to commit such atrocities as it is to believe in them.

Madame de Miramion was quickly informed as to the natural causes of this death, first by the details related to her by her brother, who was an eye-witness of them, and whose veracity admitted of no question, and afterwards by the undeniable testimony of Madame de la Fayette, who herself assured her that she had finished the glass of water from which the princess had drunk, without suffering from it. But we have no doubt that in spite of so many convincing

* Many other witnesses may also be cited, among whom the Maréchal de Bellefond, who was afterwards sent to condole with the King of England on the subject of his sister's death. The Memoirs of Madame de la Fayette, and those of Daniel de Cosnac, Archbishop of Aix, can also be referred to.

† The History of Madame de Maintenon, by the Duc de Noailles, of the Academy, 3 vols., edition of 1859.

proofs, she was the first to advise her brother to leave such a dangerous Court.

M. de Purnon, from that time forth, sought to throw up his employment in order to go and live in the country. However, at the request of the Duc d'Orleans, he consented to remain for some time attached to his household, and became first steward to the second Madame. But in 1674 he sold his place to M. Manuel de Valonne, and retired for the rest of his life to his estate of Purnon, in Poitou,* where he edified all those who lived in his neighbourhood by his charity and piety.

* As this estate had not then a suitable house, M. de Purnon bought the château of Marsay, which was close by. It was a fortified castle, with towers, machicoulis, and drawbridges, and looked very dull; but he soon converted it into a magnificent residence. He built in front two glazed galleries in the Italian style, which he ornamented with portraits of all his family, and of many of the celebrities of his time. He laid out the grounds in avenues and flower-beds, with rich terraces and fountains, which reminded him of Saint Cloud. It was there that M. de Purnon died on the 16th of September, 1781, and there may still be seen the pictures he had collected, which are preserved with the greatest care by one of his heirs, the Marquis de la Messelière. In contemplating these personages of days gone by, in the lofty halls of this feudal castle, which time and the Revolution have allowed to remain almost intact, and in the midst of yew trees clipped for more than two centuries, it seems as if we live the past over again, and that we breathe the air of magnificence of that great age. In 1760 the estate of Purnon was sold to M. Achard de la Haye, who built on it a splendid house which is now inhabited by his granddaughter, the Baronne de Goyon.

II.

As time went on, Madame de Miramion withdrew herself more than ever from the great world, and devoted her whole time to God and her community, giving the most touching example of every virtue to her companions. She shewed in a like degree an extreme promptitude to obey and an admirable patience in bearing with annoyances; governing her sisters with a gentleness, a courtesy, and a solicitude which nothing could discourage or rebut. She was a real mother to them all, and at the same time the friend and confidante of each. The more she advanced in years, the more her austerity inclined her to mortify herself and the more did her love of prayer increase. Her soul at times seemed altogether detached from worldly things, and as it were inundated with the abundance of divine gifts.

The extraordinary favours which God granted her often urged her to make fresh resolutions towards perfection, which she wrote down in order to carry them out more faithfully. Thanks to this habit, we are let into the secrets of some of these pious intentions, and the following notes will show the beauty of this truly chosen soul:

"Thank God every day for all the favours He has granted me; I will spend at least three hours daily in meditation and prayer to know what He desires of me, and ask for grace to perform it. Every time the clock strikes I will adore God in my heart.

"My life and all the faculties of my soul are only

given to me to glorify God; I will do this to the best of my ability. I will place God in the midst of all I love, and abandon myself altogether to his good pleasure. Renew every month my baptismal vows.

"Empty myself of myself, of the world, and of creatures, to be filled with God alone; make frequent retreats with God.

"Put the axe to the root of my imperfections to cut them down and pluck them up; thrust it in to the quick; enable me to preserve chastity by the mortification of my heart and of all my senses.

"Suffer unto death after the example of our Lord; ask for sufferings, remember my sins, and be attentive to whatever God may require of me.

"Sacrifice myself and abandon myself entirely into the hands of God, conforming myself in all things to His holy will.

"The Spirit of God is as necessary to me as the air I breathe.

"Die like the grain of wheat to live again in Thee, my God!

"Anticipate while I am in health the eagerness which one feels at the hour of death to have done all one could. I will die to myself and to all my senses, and mortify myself in small things as well as in great ones.

"Nothing that is done for God can be called small.

"I will rather do the will of others than my own.

"Follow the exercises of the Rule faithfully, whatever indifference I may feel for devotion; live in a spirit of faith.

"Not to grudge any sacrifice in the service of God. Undo and amend in myself all that is displeasing to His goodness.

"Behave with gentleness and charity towards my neighbours.

"May the holy and adorable will of God be for ever accomplished in me."

Such was the living fountain whence Madame de Miramion unceasingly drew the ardour which revived her courage and the spirit of abnegation which governed all her actions.

When she had seen her community firmly established and good order everywhere prevailing, she resolved to take advantage of it to resign her functions of perpetual superioress by obliging the sisters to observe the rule which forbid them to elect a superioress for more than three years at a time. But these pious nuns, who felt how much Madame de Miramion's qualities and, above all, the gift of administration which she possessed to such a rare degree, rendered her still necessary for the guidance of their house, had recourse to the intervention of their superior, M. Ferret, and to the pastoral influence of the Archbishop of Paris, intreating them to induce her to change her resolve.

The Archbishop, Monseigneur de Harlay de Chanvalon, who knew Madame de Miramion well,* after having urged her for some time without obtaining any alteration in her determination, finally

* By the family de Lamoignon, to which they were both related.

begged she would write down the reasons which made her wish to resign her functions, but added that afterwards she must submit to his decision. She obeyed, and a few days afterwards she gave him the following reflections:—

"For some time I have desired that the article of perpetuity should be done away with; the Superioress of the Sisters of Saint Géneviève ought to be triennial, this seems to me to be God's will. All the reasons I have given appear to me to be good ones, both for my own welfare, and for the glory of God; but as I know I may be mistaken, I submit all of them to the obedience I owe you.

"Besides the reasons that I have given there are others that I cannot mention.

"For some time past it has appeared to me that several sisters desired to see the term of three years established; some of the sisters as well as myself regret that I cannot always be present at the exercises of the community.

"I fear that after my death the sisters would not have sufficient respect for the sister who would be elected superioress; I could arrange that during my life-time.

"I should be very glad to have a little more time to occupy myself with God; I am inwardly urged to do all I can for that, but, nevertheless, with submission.

"It is not that I wish to avoid being elected for the first three years; but after that I would beg them quietly to elect another; this might be done without pomp or ceremony, in a friendly manner. If I am per-

petual there would necessarily be much ceremony after my death, and perhaps some disagreement; this I wish to avoid.

"The continual mistakes I make in this charge, from my want of wisdom and merit, make me desire to be released from it. I fear it will hinder God's grace in me; I fancy that God often inspires me with the idea that the community will do much more good after my death than during my life-time.

"Some people in the world say that I am very cunning to have caused myself to be made perpetual Superior, and that it is a bad example. Several persons have spoken to me about it. Thus, even from pride, I should wish to get rid of it. . . . . I have always commanded and never obeyed; I should like to do so before I die, and that alone will lessen my desire of being a nun.

"So many things are necessary to make a good superioress that it frightens me; I feel I am so far from having the requisite qualities. A good superior must have discernment of character to know when to press on some souls and keep others back; to distinguish between nature and grace; to know at once what she ought to grant or refuse; and to weigh well the necessities which may arise either for the private or general good of the community.

"It is not enough to look to present inconveniences, future consequences must also be considered. Each one in particular sees and feels only her own troubles; the superioress must enter into the troubles of all without giving way foolishly or from weakness, but also without being too harsh or firm; this medium is

difficult to attain. A superioress ought also to endeavour to enter into the spirit of God, so as to be guided by it, that she may act according to that spirit and not according to her own will, or feelings, or temper. She must weigh everything maturely, with great charity and patience; not be weary or discouraged; have a certain degree of firmness, yet without obstinacy. She must not close or shut up hearts, but open them; be glad when they say what they think, without appearing surprised at it, whatever it may be. Confidence in God, distrust of oneself, deep humility, good example, punctuality and assiduity at all the exercises.—Who has all this?"

The archbishop saw, on the contrary, by these objections, that no one was more worthy than Madame de Miramion to be Perpetual Superioress of the Sisters of Sainte Géneviève, and in spite of all she could say, he ordered her to give way to the desire of the whole community, and not to resign her office till her death.

She at once acquiesced without any resistance, and simply through obedience; but to the great satisfaction of all the sisters.

"She might easily," says Choisy, "have procured by her credit great riches for her community, but she was satisfied with a humble establishment, and one which should only exist by labour and care, persuaded that riches lead to the decline of discipline in religious houses, and that in order to draw down God's blessing, much must be left to Providence."

Although she lived out of the world and was continually occupied with the direction of her house, this

retirement and care did not prevent her from seeing her friends, loving them tenderly, and often giving them sensible proofs of it.

In the month of October, 1671, Madame de Harlay, daughter of the Président de Lamoignon, fell dangerously ill of the small-pox. M. de Harlay, her husband, who was then Procureur-Général and afterwards President of the Parliament of Paris, shut himself up with her. Madame de Miramion, as soon as she knew of it, went to nurse her, and did not leave her till her death. M. de Harlay greatly admired her devotedness and kindness ; it redoubled his esteem, and he never lost an opportunity of proving his gratitude to her.*

The following year the news was suddenly spread one morning that the young Princesse de Conti had been found insensible in her bed. Madame de Miramion, in tears, immediately hastened to offer her services ; but the princess had already ceased to breathe.

"Last night," writes Madame de Sévigné, "the Princesse de Conti had an attack of apoplexy, she is not yet dead, but she is quite insensible, she is pulseless and speechless. She is being martyrised to bring her to. There are a hundred persons in her room and three hundred in her house; they weep, they cry—that is all I know for the moment."†

But the following day she died.

"The Princesse de Conti died a few hours after I

* Choisy.—M. de Harlay was one of the most esteemed men of his time, and, which is rare, he was praised by all his contemporaries. He was a friend of La Fontaine, whose son he undertook to bring up.

† Letter to Madame de Grignan, 4th of February, 1672.

had closed my missive, without having recovered her senses; the distress of those around her may be imagined.

"The Duke, the Princes de Conti, Madame de Longueville, Madame de Gamaches, wept with all their hearts.

"Madame de Gèvres chose to have fainting fits, Madame de Brissac screamed out loud, and threw herself about everywhere; it was necessary to send her away because she made such a commotion that no one knew what they were about; every one was trying to account for this sudden death. 'Those who prove too much prove nothing,' says,—I don't know who.—However, the sorrow is universal. The king appeared much affected, and pronounced her panegyric by saying that she was more admirable for her merits than for her large fortune. She leaves by her will twenty thousand crowns to the poor, and the same sum to her servants. She wishes to be buried in the parish church quite simply like a common person. Yesterday I saw this holy princess laid out; she is disfigured by the martyrdom they made her suffer in her mouth; they broke two of her teeth and burned her head; that is to say, that if one did not die of apoplexy, we, poor patients, should be much to be pitied for the state to which we should be brought! There are splendid reflections to make upon this death, so cruel for others, but so blessed for her who did not feel it, and was so well prepared for it."*

* The Princesse de Conti was buried at Saint André-des-Arcs. Upon the monument raised over her was written, "During the famine of 1662, she sold all her jewels to feed the poor."

The Princesse de Conti, who had become a widow in 1666, at nine and twenty, had filled up the time that intervened between her own and her husband's death, by the practice of every Christian virtue. Madame de Miramion, who was the confidant and the ordinary distributor of her alms, felt deep regret at her premature end.

III.

SINCE his accession to the throne, Louis XIV. had gone on without stopping from conquest to conquest. After Flanders and Franche-Compté, the famous passage of the Rhine had just given him Holland. Everywhere monuments were raised to the victorious king, monuments which were to last longer than the conquests themselves; for the Triumphal Arch of the Gate St. Denis, and the other monuments of those victories, were hardly finished before the Low Countries were again given up. The three Dutch provinces were vacated with as much haste as they had been taken possession of, and this rapid evacuation caused a considerable movement of troops.

In 1673, the troops who passed through or sojourned at Melun, brought with them such foul air that it caused contagious diseases. All communication with the neighbouring towns was obliged to be prohibited. As more than a hundred persons died in a day, people got frightened, and the sick were abandoned. No one would keep them in their houses, and they died in the streets deprived of all ordinary help. The principal magistrates, and the officials of the town were on the point of deserting it, when Madame de Miramion, who

possessed the château of Rubelle, in the neighbourhood of Melun, having been informed of the sad state of the town, arrived to succour it, accompanied by doctors and grey sisters.

"You know the horror people have of receiving the contagious breath of a dying man, which seems to carry inevitable death to the living. The illness which destroys one places all others in jeopardy; the danger is almost as great for those who suffer and those who tend them; and in nursing this kind of illness, one can but have the melancholy consolation of seeing them die, or the sad hope of surviving them but a few days."* But Madame de Miramion was far above feelings of ordinary charity. Always ready to perform heroic actions, she voluntarily made the sacrifice of her life; and with an admirable devotedness remained firm in the midst of a danger which made the stoutest hearts tremble.

Hardly had she arrived when she called the magistrates together, for her well-known character gave her authority everywhere. She asked them to give her a house to serve as a hospital, and had furniture brought for it from Rubelle. Following her example, everyone wished to provide what was most necessary. The grey sisters were established, and the sick were transported there. Madame de Miramion tended them herself, and exhorted them to prepare for a holy death.

The priests and monks who had fled from fear of the infection, were ashamed to see a simple woman

* Funeral oration of Madame de Montausier, by Fléchier.

undertaking what they ought to have done themselves. Some of those who had left, came back on hearing of it, and by their eagerness to make amends for their cowardice strove to redeem their character. Soon all were filled with a fresh zeal, and during the two months that the epidemic lasted, Madame de Miramion remained at Melun without thinking of her other affairs, which she considered as less pressing. She directed everything as if God Himself had committed to her care the salvation of this unfortunate town. Night-watching, exhortations, money—nothing was spared. She was full of attention to the sick, particularly to the soldiers. "They expose their lives for us every day," she said to the nuns; "strive, my sisters, to save them; we are all interested in it." But their souls appeared infinitely more precious to her than their bodies, and she tried to make them understand that as they saw death nearer and oftener than other men, they ought also to be the better prepared for it. The virulence of the epidemic gave greater weight to her words, for bodily pain and suffering are often necessary to purify the soul from the stain of sin. Her charity gained all hearts, and the spirit of faith which animated her, confirmed the good work. Many at her entreaties made a general confession, and promised to live more regularly; others died, with such sentiments of contrition as well nigh to redeem their past lives.

In the midst of such constant fatigue, Madame de Miramion was only kept up by her loving zeal. The terrible illness around her prevented her thinking of her own sufferings. She still threw up all the food she

took, but her devotedness gave her a strength which she had not ventured to hope for.

When she returned to Paris, worn out with fatigue, she learned that the same epidemic was raging at Senlis, and that the same wants were felt there. Filled with her usual burning zeal, she would have started off at once to render them the same services, if M. Ferret, her superior, had not added the weight of his authority to the prayers and tears of the sisters. But on this occasion obedience outweighed charity.

"Besides," as Choisy says, "her charity was well regulated, for she did not allow herself to perform all the good works which offered themselves to her, until she had acquitted herself of what she considered the most important obligations." Before devoting herself to strangers she thought of what she owed to her own parish; therefore during the thirty-five years that she lived near Saint Nicolas, she never missed an opportunity of helping the seminary as well as the community of priests in this parish.

This community had been instituted in 1612, by M. Bourdoise (whom Saint François de Sales called "the holy priest"), with the view of raising the character of the priesthood. The associates lived together, but without taking any vows, or tying themselves down otherwise than by a mutual feeling of ardent charity. They lived near the principal door of the Church of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, in the Rue Saint Victor, when the curé of this parish, the Abbé Froget, allowed them to serve in his church. Here they acquitted themselves most worthily of all ecclesiastical functions till 1631, at which period the first Archbishop of Paris

formed them into a community. In 1644, their house became a small seminary, and the Abbé Froget, in order to provide for the wants of so useful an establishment, started in his parish a charitable work which was called the clerical "Burse." The business of this association, which was composed both of ladies and gentlemen, was to go every year from house to house to solicit the necessary funds for the maintenance of the young seminarists.

All the pious persons of the parish, which then contained many of the best families, took part in this good work, and the Présidente de Nesmond, and her sister, Mademoiselle de Lamoignon, were the first to join it.

The association had already existed several years, and the seminary had already sent forth a great many distinguished ecclesiastics, when Madame de Miramion came to live in the parish of Saint Nicolas, and at once interested herself in the work.

When she found, however, that this establishment which rendered such important services to the Church was dependent on annual donations which it was necessary to solicit continually, her usual foresight made her fear that it could not last long. The house which this seminary occupied did not belong to it, and the letters of authorisation accorded by the king, had been registered with great restrictions. These two impediments to the stability of the work pre-occupied her so much that she immediately left no stone unturned to set aside the difficulty.

Not content with employing her influence, she began by helping them with money. After giving seventeen thousand francs for the maintenance of three young

seminarists, she undertook to pay the annual stipend of three priests who were called "oblates," and who went to assist the curés of the poorest parishes in the diocese. To this she added an annuity of nine hundred francs, to found a low mass to be said every day in the chapel of the community in the Church of Saint Nicolas.

For the same object, in 1663, following the advice of the benevolent Princesse de Conti, who always assisted her in her good works, she had gone to implore the charity of M. de Conti. This prince, who had led a very dissipated life in his youth, had become exceedingly pious since his marriage. He it was who drove the actors out of the provinces which he governed, and sent there ardent missionaries to convert the Protestants. Madame de Miramion when she had explained to him the object she had in view, found no difficulty in interesting him in the future welfare of the little seminary; and the prince immediately gave her thirty-six thousand francs, which were employed in the purchase of the house. Besides this she obtained that the letters patent formerly granted to this establishment by the king should be registered without any restriction by parliament. The Président de Nesmond, her son-in-law, in order to please her, took a lively part in this affair, which had until then, seemed impossible to accomplish; and thanks to their joint efforts the seminary of Saint Nicolas was established on a permanent footing.

It was at this period, and out of gratitude for so many favours, that Madame de Miramion was elected

treasurer of the clerical Burse, an office that she held till her death.

Later, when the directors of the seminary, having no longer sufficient room, were obliged to build, she it was who, from her own and her friends' purses, procured them the necessary funds for their new college.

She likewise provided the young priests (who left the seminary to go to Ireland) with silver chalices, church vestments, and wearing apparel; and during more than thirty years she had all the surplices and church linen of this establishment washed and got up by her community.

This seminary, of which Madame de Miramion was thus the principal benefactress, probably owed to its usefulness and to the unostentatious nature of its foundation its escape from the wear and tear of time, and of the troubles of the great revolution; for in the midst of the ruin of so many magnificent endowments, it has remained just as it was two centuries ago, and now serves as an adjunct to the little seminary of Saint Sulpice. The immense halls on the ground floor, which were formerly used as refectories, still serve the same purpose for the new generation; and among the illustrious guests it has had the honour of sheltering, is the eminent and venerable Bishop of Orleans, Mgr. Dupanloup, who was the Director of this seminary in 1840.

But it was above all to the Church of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet that Madame de Miramion was liberal and even prodigal, for she began by giving to it fifty thousand francs; and when the building was in danger

of falling from the age and weakness of the pillars, she sent six thousand francs to have it repaired, and became security for twelve thousand francs more, which she afterwards paid; without counting all the vestments in gold and silver cloth, in velvet and damask, the silver candlesticks, the remonstrance and canopy for the Blessed Sacrament, all of which she also gave.

The Church of Saint Nicolas, rebuilt about 1665, at the corner of the Rue Saint Victor and the Rue des Bernardins, owes, therefore, not only its beauty, but its very existence, to the liberality of Madame de Miramion.

It was in this church, next door to their community, that the Sisters of Sainte Géneviève had their private oratory, which was formed of the two first chapels to the right of the altar, and communicated with each other by a large archway, which is still to be seen. It was in this reserved enclosure that for more than thirty years Madame de Miramion came and knelt several times a day, and from thence that her most fervent prayers ascended to God. After her death her heart was deposited there, where it remained until the profanations of 1793.*

* This chapel is still dedicated to Sainte Géneviève, but beyond this souvenir the church of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet has preserved no other trace of the existence of Madame de Miramion. Is it not desirable that a commemorative inscription should be placed where her heart was so long deposited, in order to recall to the memory of the faithful the name and virtues of the first benefactress of this church?

IV.

On Friday the 19th of July, 1675, a solemn procession to the shrine of Sainte Généviève, patroness of Paris, took place, and the newspapers of that time speak of it as one of the most remarkable which ever was made.

These processions were only allowed in cases of emergency and in virtue of the king's order, a parliamentary decree, and a mandatory letter from the Archbishop of Paris and the Abbé of Sainte Généviève.

The rain having continued incessantly for two months that year, and every hope of a harvest having been destroyed, the Church ordered public prayers at the tomb of Sainte Généviève to obtain its cessation. These prayers having obtained the desired result, a procession was formed in order to give thanks to God for His mercy.

The tomb of the humble shepherdess was in the underground crypt of the church of Sainte Généviève, Rue de Clovis, and the shrine which contained her relics was exposed behind the high altar of the upper church. It was from thence that it was fetched in great pomp and carried processionally to Nôtre Dame.

This procession, at which Madame de Miramion had the pious satisfaction of assisting, with all the sisters of her community, who formed the escort of the shrine of their holy patroness, was favoured by splendid weather, and passed through the narrow streets of old Paris (which were strewn with flowers or hung

with magnificent tapestry) without meeting with the slightest accident*.

Madame de Sévigné, who was an eyewitness of the imposing ceremony, thus speaks of it to her daughter:

"I have been with Madame de Vins, the Abbé Arnauld, and d'Acqueville, to see the procession of Sainte Géneviève go by. We came back very early, it was only two o'clock; many people will not reach home before evening. Do you know that this procession was something very beautiful?

"All the different religious orders, all the parish priests, all the Canons of Nôtre Dame, the Archbishop officiating pontifically, and blessing right and left, went on foot until they reached the mother church. This was on the left; on the right marched the Abbé of Sainte Géneviève, barefooted, preceded by a hundred and fifty monks, barefooted also, with his crozier and mitre, like the Archbishop, and giving his benediction in the same manner. . . . . The Parliament in its red robes, and all the Courts of law, followed the shrine, which was brilliant with precious stones, and carried by twenty men dressed in white, barefooted. . . . . You will ask me why this shrine was taken down; it was to pray for the cessation of the late rain, and to obtain warm, dry weather, both of which mercies happened just at the moment that the procession took place."

A month afterwards Madame de Miramion assisted in the Church of the Carmelites at another religious

* Memoirs of the Duc de Saint-Simon.

ceremony, which was also magnificent, although very sad and mournful. It was the funeral rites of Marie de Wignerod, Duchesse d'Aiguillon, peeress of France.*

"I have to announce to you, with the Apostle, that all things come to an end," exclaimed the Bishop of Nîmes to the numerous company who had assembled on the occasion and who were listening to him with rapt attention, "in order to lead you to God, who alone is eternal."

"The sad remains of the illustrious dead, the tears of those who mourn for her, the altars covered with black, the priests who offer for her the tremendous sacrifice; a preacher who, on the subject of one who is gone from us takes occasion to describe the vanity of all things mortal; all this funeral preparation has no doubt already greatly impressed your minds. At the sight of so many funeral objects nature is struck with awe; a sad expression passes over all faces; whether from affection or compassion, every heart is touched, and every one regretting the death before him and fearing for his own, is ready to acknowledge that the world has nothing solid or lasting; that it is only a shadow, and a shadow which soon passes away. . . . . .

"But I am speaking of a penitent soul who has seen from afar her Lord's coming, and has prepared herself for it by solitude and prayer. I see through these railings that choir where she has so often sung the hymns of Zion; those oratories where she so often

* Title to which she had right through her duché-pairie d'Aiguillon, and which she could transmit to her descendants.

wept over her faults; that cloister where she set an example of so many virtues; and, to sum up all, this monastery, which she supported by her liberality, frequented in her retreats, and edified by her example."

Madame de Miramion, who had admired more than any one else the ardour of her zeal, the greatness of her courage, and the princely generosity of her charity, sincerely regretted this illustrious protectress of the poor.

Every year, fearing, like Saint François de Sales, that the distractions of the world and the multiplicity of her occupations should tempt her to be too much given to outward things, Madame de Miramion made a spiritual retreat of eight days.

Several times during these retreats her director, the Abbé Ferret, ordered her to write down all the thoughts with which God had inspired her, and she did it from obedience: but the Abbé de Choisy, who says he had had all her original manuscripts, has only made two of them known to us, which are given at the end of this book, among Madame de Miramion's writings.

As he says, "The grace of God will be seen throughout these meditations, inspiring her continually with a fresh spirit of humility, mortification, and self-annihilation."

In the midst of the graces that God gave her, she was not, however, altogether exempt from temptations, principally concerning articles of faith. One day, grieved at her own blindness, she complained of her doubts to M. Ferret; and he replied—

"Madame, rest in peace; you have faith enough,

since you act according to faith: these clouds will pass away, and light will come back."

Madame de Miramion had the sorrow of watching the gradual decline of this wise adviser; and so, foreseeing the loss she was about to sustain, and wishing to have his advice upon certain questions which preoccupied her, both as to her community and herself, she wrote to him as follows:

"As you are the one person in the whole world for whom God has given me the greatest confidence and esteem, I beg you will tell me, in case God should wish me to make the sacrifice of your life before my own, the course which you consider best for His glory in what I am going to propose to you." And she presented to him a list of written questions, to which he also replied in writing. The humility of these questions is as edifying as the wisdom of the replies.*

Madame de Miramion's health continued very bad, and her vomitings increased. But several times during her prayers God had inspired her with the thought that there are souls designed to do penance on earth for the sins of others; she felt that she was one of these privileged souls, and that if her sufferings were gladly accepted by her, and offered to God in a spirit of penitence, her sacrifice might thus contribute to the salvation of many.

This idea sustained her in her entire submission to the will of God; and when she told it in confidence to M. Ferret, he said to her—

* See the Appendix, where they are placed, in order not to interrupt the narrative.

"You ought to offer to God the sufferings you have endured for the last fifteen years, and be always in the firm resolution of suffering still more for the conversion of sinners, for the time of your penances for them is not yet arrived. When God sees fit to accept your sacrifice, He will give you a sensible token of it, by curing you of your sickness."

On the 16th January, 1677, M. Ferret died. Madame de Miramion, whose director he had been for sixteen years, mourned for him as for a father. After having had his body embalmed, and his heart enclosed in a silver vase, to be deposited according to his desire in the choir of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, she had all the funeral honours due to his high position in the church rendered to him at her own expense.

The day following the funeral, as she was kneeling in the church, and held in her hands the heart which was going to be for ever sealed under the stone, she asked God, in whose Presence she felt convinced M. Ferret was, to accomplish His holy will in her. The same day she was cured of her sickness. She had already forgotten what had happened, when seven or eight days afterwards, being before the Blessed Sacrament, she remembered it, and believed that her cure was the token that God gave her of His will. She was exceedingly embarrassed at this, for anything extraordinary was very painful to her; she feared also to be unfaithful to God; and not having as yet a fresh director, she did not know to whom to turn for advice.

Easter having arrived, she went to confession to M. Benjamin, the new curé of Saint Nicolas, Doctor of

Divinity and Ecclesiastical Judge of Paris, and told him all M. Ferret had said to her.

"Madame," said he, "this is the accomplishment of what M. Ferret predicted to you; you are no longer sick, without having taken anything to cure you: the will of God appears visibly, and you can now begin your penances for sinners." He advised her, nevertheless, to speak on the subject to four doctors, separately.

She chose M. Grandin, M. Chamillart, M. Courcier, and M. Marcot: they were all four of the same opinion as M. Benjamin. M. Vesou, the physician, was also called in; he admitted that "he had never understood the cause of her sickness, and still less how it was cured; that there was in it all something he did not understand; and that the hand of God had visibly acted in her." A declaration which doctors do not make without strong reasons.

She then understood what God required from her in restoring her to health; and immediately resumed her habits of austerity; her fastings were doubled, her prayers longer and continued even during the night, and iron chains and disciplines were not forgotten whenever she could do penance for sinners.

At the death of M. Ferret, M. Edme Jolly, Superior General of the Mission of the Priests of Saint Vincent de Paul,* having been elected Superior of the Sisters

* Edme Jolly had been trained in piety by Saint Vincent de Paul himself, and sent to Rome by him to be superior of the house which he had established in the Eternal City. He was elected Superior of the Lazarists at the death of Réné Alméras, who had succeeded to Saint Vincent de Paul. He was one of

of Sainte Géneviève, Madame de Miramion took him also for her director. In order to know her better, he requested her to write a short history of her life.

Madame de Miramion resisted for some time, but M. Jolly having persisted, she obeyed.

It is to this confession, which would cause repetition here, and which is included in the other writings of Madame de Miramion at the end of the book, that we are indebted for knowing, in her own words, some of the events of her life; and above all the feelings which actuated her.

V.

On the 10th of December, 1677, Madame de Miramion suddenly heard of the death of M. de Lamoignon, whom she had left the evening before in perfect health.

These are the terms in which the public journals and the letters of that period relate this event:

"Messire Guillaume de Lamoignon, First President of the Parliament of Paris, died on Thursday night, the 9th of December, aged sixty-one. The loss of this great magistrate, whose singular piety, inviolable attachment to the king's service, incorruptible integrity, and great learning, had so long been known throughout the kingdom, is extremely felt, and he is universally regretted."

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the most celebrated doctors of divinity of Paris. The Queen, Anne of Austria, often sought his advice during her regency, and he it was for whom Mazarin sent, to assist him at the hour of death.

"You can easily judge for yourself, sir," writes Father Bouhours to M. de Bussy, on the 4th of January, "what a blow the death of the president has been to us. It is a thunder-bolt more surprising and more terrible than the cannon-ball which carried off M. de Turenne. It is not strange, after all, that a soldier should be struck down sooner than another person; but that a man in perfect health, and not old, should die suddenly of brain-fever without there being any cause for it, it is this which appears to me so dreadful."

"It is true," says Father Rapin, also to M. de Bussy, "that this death is a great blow to the friends and family of the great man whom we mourn; but it is a great grace for himself. For two years he had prepared himself for death; he made his will last year at Baville; the only books of devotion which he used latterly were those which treated of death. Five weeks before his death he wrote to his daughters of Sainte Marie, a letter which reads like a prophecy. At the opening of Parliament three weeks before he made a speech in which he alluded to the subject, saying, that people never thought enough about death; and yet for two years he had been in better health than before. The doctors say that the cause of his death was stone, which brought on brain-fever; for he was hardly conscious from the beginning. But I feel as if it were not so; but that God is angry with us. In this wretched age in which we live we were not worthy to possess any longer so great a man; for there never was such a holy soul united to such a superior mind. But the greatest

praise of all is, that the people weep for him, and every one mourns his death as if it were the loss of a personal friend or benefactor. As for you, sir, you have lost a sincere and attached friend; he knew you to be a straightforward and remarkably clever man, and he loved you much. I am thinking of doing something to make him known to those who had not the privilege of his acquaintance, as well as to posterity. For heaven's sake aid me with your knowledge, for you knew and appreciated him thoroughly. His uprightness, his high-mindedness, his wisdom, and his modesty, were equally remarkable. He was a man who never made a mistake, in the midst of the snares of high office or of the Court. But you know it all; have the goodness to write some account of it, and let me see your ideas on the subject—you owe this to the friendship you bore him, and to that which you do me the honour to have for me."*

The grief of Madame de Miramion may easily be imagined. She had been for more than thirty years the friend and confidante of this great statesman. He fully appreciated her merits, and having a great respect for her judgment, he never decided on any matter in which the poor were interested, without consulting her; he laid before her all his difficulties, and generally followed her advice; for she had a very clear perception of right and wrong; and it seemed as if God would recompense her zeal by the gift of sagacity, for she was never at a loss for

* Manuscript of the Imperial Library, vol. viii.

expedients, and what seemed impossible to others, always succeeded in her hands.

She joined her tears to those of the public, and gave him at her own expense a most magnificent funeral, in the church of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, where the Abbé Fléchier, afterwards Bishop of Nîmes, pronounced his funeral oration.*

"It is true," he said in this oration, "that goodness, properly so called, belongs to God alone .... Nevertheless certain noble souls are raised up at all times, who, acting as the instruments of this Sovereign goodness, know no other bounds to their charity than those which God has set to their power. Such was M. de Lamoignon. .... Near the walls of this royal city is a magnificent building (the general hospital); it is there that the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, and the sick cured. The zeal which people often feel for a new establishment, the honour which accrues to them from a great work of charity—all this contributed at first to the foundation of this holy house. But then people got tired, and the principal resources of the charity became dried up. The president, in virtue of his position, but still more from his own inclination, undertook to support and enlarge a work which his predecessor had begun with so much success.

"What trouble he took to seek for funds for this hospital at a period when the misery was increasing, and charity grown cold!

"What difficulty he had to establish order among

* Choisy. The 18th February, 1679.

this troop of unruly beggars! What did he not do to accustom them to industry and piety! He did not confine himself to housing them; he assisted them effectually, and joined alms to his influence. For he devoted all he received every year for his judicial labours to the relief of the poor; he seemed scarcely content to give them bread if he had not himself earned it for them; he did not offer them the refuse of his worldly goods, but the produce of his own industry. He considered this part of his fortune as sacred, and his heart was in it as in a treasure. You," he added, turning to Madame de Miramion, "pious confidante of his secret almsgiving—you, who to-day pay him the public homage of a holy friendship; you know with what joy he spent these, the fruits of his self-denying labours, in the noblest acts of charity, and thus honoured God with his substance, and caused His name to be glorified."*

* Funeral Oration pronounced by Fléchier on the 18th of February, 1679, in the church of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet. Fléchier was tutor to the son of M. de Caumartin, Madame de Miramion's cousin.

CHAPTER XI.

MADAME DE MIRAMION, DIRECTRESS OF THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE.

1678—1682.

"To love something more than self, this is the secret of all that is great: to know how to live out of oneself, this is the aim of every generous soul."—*E. S.*

I.

IT may be said of Madame de Miramion according to the expression of Holy Scripture, that, throughout her life one day "told the other" of some new service to be done for God. Even in the nights "her heart watched," and she constantly received some new light whereby to glorify so great a Master.

She had regular hours of prayer in the night as well as in the day; and when all slept around her, at the hour when all nature seems to sink into slumber, she rose up to pray, to devise new schemes for her poor, and to meditate upon death. Thus her nights were neither solitary nor idle; for, during these pious watches, her mind, which was always filled with the

presence of God, often found some fresh means of honouring Him in His suffering members.

One evening, in the year 1678, on returning home by the quay, she heard at the port of La Tournelle several young girls laughing and romping in an improper manner with some young men. She was struck with the idea of the evil which might result from such familiarity, and at the scandal thus given. She thought it over several times during the night, to try and devise some means of remedying it. In the morning she sent for one or two of the girls to come to her, after having first spoken to their mothers. Without finding fault with them, she asked them what they did all day, and easily perceived from their replies that idleness and want of religious principle might soon lead them into sin. Anxious to save them at any risk from so great a danger, she proposed to them to come to her that very day to learn to sew, assuring them that they would soon be able to gain their own living if they were industrious and willing. They accepted, and a short time afterwards Madame de Miramion established them comfortably in a house which she took in her own neighbourhood, and which was called *the work-room of the parish.* This establishment was directed by two mistresses, to whom the young girls were entrusted. The day was begun and ended by prayer, and, in order to occupy their minds during the hours devoted to needle-work, they were taught to sing simple, innocent songs, or pious hymns. They also learned to read and write, and three times a week they were catechised. At mid-day dinner was served gratuitously for every one,

and in the evening those who had gained enough had their supper given to them. The greater number went home to sleep, but those who had no parents remained as boarders, so that this house was at the same time an orphanage and a work-room. The usefulness of this establishment, and the numerous advantages it offered to the young girls, were not long in being appreciated by the poor families of the parish. The girls who were admitted there were more esteemed, and as they learned how to work, they found it easier to get settled in life, or to obtain good places.

The success of this experiment from the very beginning caused it to be imitated, at first in the different parishes of Paris itself, and afterwards at Versailles, Fontainebleau, and Saint Germain, where Madame de Maintenon kindly took them under her benevolent protection.

The king, as soon as he heard of this new plan for improving the morality of the poor, approved of it highly, and sent to compliment Madame de Miramion on her excellent inspiration.

Since that time, this idea, developed and perfected, like everything which is really good, has given birth to the orphan asylums and work-rooms, which now-a-days everywhere render such great services to young girls and to the families of the poor.

II.

In the same year, Mademoiselle Violé, the virtuous Directress of the Sisters of Providence, having died, four nuns of this community came to beg that Ma-

dame de Miramion would accept the direction of their house.

She had at first a great objection to undertaking it, fearing, she said, "that the multitude of her secular affairs might prevent her thinking of her own soul."

But the Spirit of God, whom she consulted continually, inspired her with other ideas, and this is what she herself wrote on the subject:

"After having expressed to my sisters how reluctant I was to take charge of the Sisters of Providence, I thought the following night that I did not love God purely, not choosing to expose myself to labour and annoyance in order to endeavour to gain souls to Him. After a feeling of contrition this thought came into my head: 'The fear that you have of being wounded yourself is the cause that you do not dare to rush into the thick of the battle, although it is in order to prevent Him whom you say you love being wounded to death; this is not loving God simply. He will sustain you in the fight, and make of you what He wills.

"'It still remains for you to make the sacrifice of all your time, to be employed as He wills and not as you choose. When you serve Him in retirement, fear lest you should do it from self-love; but when you serve Him in your neighbour, you do it for the love of Himself. Let her who is called to retirement, remain there; but she who is called to action, let her act. The saints will have all eternity for contemplation; and this life is given for working, to those whose vocation it is. Do not fear to be misunderstood; or to

undertake too much; provided you do nothing except by obedience and with submission, acting in and speaking of everything with simplicity.'

"I am naturally fond of undertaking and doing a great deal. God has given me a willing heart; and this has always made me, and still makes me, distrust my own feelings. For some time I have wished for greater retirement, and I always fear to be too much distracted, although I very much like to labour for God."

Madame de Miramion then, as she always did, left it entirely to the decision of her director, M. Jolly: "I beg that you will weigh everything before God," she wrote to him, "and especially my small merit and capacity, and the little leisure I have; however, I will obey you in this as in everything else." M. Jolly, having ordered her to undertake the charge of this community, she obeyed, and was elected Directress of the Sisters of Providence. "She often went there and gave them addresses capable of exciting the least fervent; the love of God inspired all she said, and gave her a power over all hearts; no one complained of hardships after they had listened to her; poverty and humiliation came to be desired, and each sister considered herself happy to have something to suffer."*

This community, instituted in 1643 by Marie de Lumague, widow of M. de Pollalion, under the direction of Saint Vincent de Paul, had at first been very prosperous. But since the death of its founders, it was only supported by the King's liberality, and

* Choisy.

seemed about to die out. Madame de Miramion was its second benefactress. From the day she became its Directress, till the hour of her death, she never ceased to lavish her care and gifts upon it. Thanks to her, the fortunes of this community were restored, and it long remained prosperous.* When dying, she was still preoccupied with its future fate, and she not only left it an annuity, but wrote to recommend it to the King's generosity. After her death, and through her recommendation, her daughter, the Présidente de Nesmond, was elected Directress of the Sisters of Providence, and continued to bestow upon this house all those proofs of interest and affection of which her mother had given her the example.

III.

MADAME DE MIRAMION'S charity was truly inexhaustible; for while she undertook so many good works in Paris, she interested herself equally in the country. The first thing she did was to send missionaries and establish schools there, for at all times the salvation of souls was the principal object of her charities.† She thus opened in several provinces, and at different periods of her life, more than a hundred schools for the instruction of youth, and caused more than two hundred missions to be preached at her expense in different villages.† Her income, her

* This house, situated in the faubourg Saint-Marcel, was destroyed during the revolution, and its church and convent are become private property.

† Choisy.

estates, her jewels, all were expended to supply money for her charities. And, therefore, when her man of business came one day in dismay to announce to her that she had lost a considerable sum of money, "It is not I who am to be pitied," she replied, coldly; "it is the poor."

Indeed, it was only the poor who could suffer from the diminution of her fortune, for, for some time she had given them all she possessed. No doubt if her daughter had had a family she would have "*taken it into consideration*," as she says in her will, and acted differently. But Madame de Nesmond, who had inherited an immense fortune from her father, having no family after eighteen years of married life, Madame de Miramion considered that she was free to follow her natural inclinations, and to consecrate the greater part of her fortune to the relief of the poor, and the triumph of religion.

When we consider all the good done by this generous woman during the course of a comparatively short life, if anything can surprise us, it is that her fortune, although it was considerable, could suffice for all the acts of benevolence, and all the good works which she accomplished. But it is well known that charity is essentially a work of association. This is the secret of its inexhaustible resources; and often for charitable establishments, as well as for religious institutions, God permits that the initiative and a small capital at first are the only things really necessary to obtain the end in view. A good idea, once started, bears fruit in the hearts of others, and the first mite offered draws a thousand more, which

"*amour-propre*" increases; and so all things concur in the completion of the work.

At the end of the year 1679, God, who no doubt saw fit to try Madame de Miramion by afflictions more painful to her than any money losses, and harder to bear than the sufferings she had experienced until then, touched her in what was dearest to her in the world. Her daughter, Madame de Nesmond, whose delicate health had always given her cause for great anxiety, grew weaker and weaker, and at length her lungs were so affected that the doctors declared that science was powerless to save her, and that she must soon die. Those who have only suffered in themselves do not know the full bitterness of suffering. Those who have to fear for their loved ones; who have questioned, in fear and trembling, that terrible science which knows so little, and dreaded the answer which yet they sought; those know something of the misery there is in this cruel suspense! But those only who have seen their only child suffer, and heard it condemned, those only know all that the human heart can endure of painful anguish and grievous anxiety. Time seems to stand still, life is suspended, and all our faculties stop short as if to concentrate themselves in feeling only, and to multiply in us the power of suffering.

"Oh, my God! Thy will, not mine, be done!" exclaimed Madame de Miramion, in the agony of her grief. But at that moment she hoped even against hope. For God can do everything; and the last ray of hope in the human heart is not extinguished till our last breath. Yes! God can do anything! And

so against all expectation, and in spite of the decree pronounced by the doctors, Madame de Nesmond got well. In spite of autumn and its chilliness, in spite of the oracle of Epidaurus, the poor consumptive patient recovered. Madame de Sévigné, in a letter to her daughter, tells us what means nature made use of to produce this wonderful cure. Here is the letter:—

"Livry, Wednesday. All Saints Day, 1679.

"The other day I saw poor little Madame de Nesmond, who was in the last stage of consumption. Strange to say, she is now getting visibly well by drinking asses' milk morning and evening. She had a cough which took away her voice. I do not tell you to drink it, as it does not agree with you; but I look upon it as a great misfortune that you should be deprived of such a sure and salutary remedy."

Madame de Grignan, who was on friendly terms with Madame de Nesmond, immediately wrote a reply to her mother, expressing her joy at this fortunate recovery; for on Wednesday, the 13th of December, Madame de Sévigné, again writing to her daughter, says to her: "Thank you for your message for M. and Madame de Nesmond. Her recovery is really miraculous."

IV.

TWENTY years had passed since the death of Mademoiselle Legras, the pious foundress of the Sisters of Charity. She had preceded her holy director, Saint Vincent de Paul, to the tomb only a few months, and,

according to her request, she had been buried as a simple sister in the church of Saint Laurent, on the 15th of March, 1660. But her son, M. Legras, and the sisters of her community, wishing to give her a more honourable sepulture, came to beg Madame de Miramion to obtain from the Archbishop of Paris the permission to open her grave. Mademoiselle Legras had been the first to direct Madame de Miramion in the paths of charity, and she had preserved the greatest veneration for the memory of this pious friend. She therefore at once took the necessary steps, and quickly obtained the permission she asked for.

"On the 10th of April, 1680, at nine in the evening, the tomb was opened by Nicolas Gabillon, curé of Saint Laurent, in the presence of M. Edme Jolly, Superior General of the mission, of the missionary Henri Moreau, of Madame de Miramion and a sister of her community, of M. Guérin, director of the Sisters of Charity, and of Madame Legras, the deceased's daughter-in-law, etc. . . . . They only found bones without any odour, which were deposited in a leaden coffin bearing a detailed inscription upon a copper plate, which was again let down into the grave."*

Thanks to this pious homage rendered to the remains of Mademoiselle Legras by filial affection and pious friendship, the ashes of the humble foundress of this great order have been preserved to the veneration of the sisters, and still rest, after more than two centuries, and in spite of two revolutions, in the chapel of their convent in the Rue de Bac, at Paris.

* Life of Saint Vincent de Paul, by the Abbé Maynard.

Some days afterwards Madame de Miramion received a letter from the Bishop of Angers, Monseigneur Henri Arnauld, who was brother to Doctor Arnauld, the celebrated Jansenist, and Arnauld d'Andilly, the wise and learned courtier of Louis XIV. This prelate, whom she had formerly known at Paris, was then very old, and had not left his diocese for some time, but the fame of the holy bishop's private virtues often reached her through the public press. "His goodness, together with his pastoral vigilance," says Madame de Sévigné in speaking of him, "are almost impossible to conceive. He is a man of eighty-seven years of age, who is only supported in his constant labours by the love of God and his neighbour. I talked for an hour in private with him, and found in his conversation all the vivacity of his brothers; he is a prodigy whom I am delighted to have seen with my own eyes."

Monseigneur Arnauld wrote to Madame de Miramion that he had often been discontented with the sisters of the hospital of La Flèche, whose indiscreet and irregular zeal was always getting them into trouble, and after having vainly tried every means to quiet them, he was going to abandon them altogether, if she had not the charity to come and get him out of the difficulty. He begged her in consequence to be so good as to undertake the journey to La Flèche to see for herself the cause of this disorder, "not having the slightest doubt," he added, "that if she could grant his request, her experience and advice would soon bring back peace to this community."

Madame de Miramion was ill when she received

this letter, but as care for her health never hindered her when God's service was in question,* she immediately replied to Monseigneur Arnauld that she was about to start for La Flèche, and that afterwards she would go to Angers to give him an account of the result of her mission.

She performed this journey in the stage-coach, accompanied by two sisters of Sainte Géneviève. When she arrived at La Flèche, nearly all the population came out to meet her about half a league from the town, and accompanied her to the church, where a Te Deum was sung in her honour.

As soon as she could, Madame de Miramion, much troubled at the almost royal reception they had given her, hastened to shut herself up in the community of the sisters of the hospital. There, after having questioned all the sisters separately, she persuaded those who were the cause of the neglect of the rule to withdraw quietly, and before she left, established one of the sisters she had brought with her as superioress, leaving the other to assist her in the reformation of the house.

She then went to Angers to give an account of what she had done to the Bishop, and begged he would forget the dissatisfaction the sisters had given him. The good bishop's heart was soon gained; he only wished for the good of his diocese, which he had never once left for the whole thirty years of his episcopate.†

She afterwards returned to La Flèche for some days to see to the observance of the rules she had laid

* Choisy. † Ibid.

down, and went back to Paris in the same public vehicle, ill and alone, but charmed to be thus able to practise poverty. When she reached home she suffered greatly from an attack of dysentery, which lasted fifteen months, but the weakness it occasioned did not prevent her from labouring as usual for the glory of God and the relief of her neighbour.

V.

FAR from making her proud, this success only rendered her more humble and circumspect. She never spoke of herself, and in her humility she did not dare tell her confessors the peculiar graces with which God favoured her in prayer, fearing lest she should appear to make a merit of it in their eyes, or to be too much praised for it. "I have always dreaded," she said, "that the persons who guided me should have a good opinion of me, believing that I had nothing to fear if they had a bad one, and everything to fear from my naturally vain, proud spirit if they had a good one. I dread much less the praise of other people than theirs." Sometimes she thought she heard an inward voice say to her, "You must be continually occupied with the love of God; act, suffer, and pray as being entirely His, and destined to follow Him without reserve. Always be willing to suffer. You are surprised at this: let it teach you to tell everything to your director, for why do you fear to tell all? In keeping silence you have everything to fear; it is sheer pride. If it be of God you will be told so; otherwise you will be responsible for the good which might

have been effected by grace, and which will not be done."

She wished to speak about it to her director, but did not dare do so. "I went three times to say it," she wrote, "but was afraid; in fact I repulsed these graces as if they were temptations." When she wrote to M. Jolly, far from imploring his indulgence, it was, on the contrary, to beg he would reprove her severely for her faults:

"It is, Reverend Father, from the bottom of my heart," she said to him in one of her letters, "that I wish that you should act with me as you do with the Sisters of Charity.* I look upon it as the best thing which can happen to me. Do all that you think right in order that my conduct may be most pleasing to our Lord. I abandon myself to Him in you. Even when you see that I suffer, do not give it up on that account, for I am resolved that my own will shall be destroyed, and this cannot be without pain; but I accept this pain, and offer it as a sacrifice to God. Act, therefore, Father, with full authority and firmness."

M. Jolly replied to her:—

"Your earnest entreaty, Madame, that I would tell you fully what I consider God desires of you for your greater sanctification, has induced me to read again the last letter that you did me the honour to write to me, and it appears to me to contain an unaffected description of what passes in man: at the

* Whose director he was.

bottom of our heart, the will to do right, a desire of humiliation, and of an interior life; but in our poor human nature a great dread. . . . . God requires from you a perfect obedience and an entire detachment from all created things; you ought to dread your own will more than you do. I fear you are greatly inclined to that; those who are really obedient fear lest their superiors should take into consideration what they wish or what they do not wish, and for that reason they endeavour not to show us either inclination or aversion for what is ordered them. I fear that you flatter yourself with the idea of your willingness to obey, and that you are annoyed when people are not of your opinion. It appears to me also that you are very glad to be praised for what you do, and very much vexed if you are contradicted.

"Consider often that the example you give of obedience, love, poverty, and consideration for others, will be imitated by your sisters, and that thus the spiritual good of your community depends, after God, upon you; for you must not expect they will do anything which they do not see you do. Be very humble in your relations with them, otherwise the spirit of humility will not be in your community. Take the advice of your council, and compare it with your own in all deliberations. Show no preference either for or against any one of your sisters, but a perfect indifference, and only seek to know what is for the greater glory of God and the advantage of your community.

"I should wish to add a few words on poverty; as your community is intended to be poor, it ought to be brought up as such; yet it is splendidly lodged,

and does not live, as it appears to me, in a great spirit of poverty.

"As to yourself, use your fortune as though you were poor, fearing to employ it in superfluities, and ask permission for every unusual expense."

We see by this letter that her director did not spare his penitent in any way. But far from complaining of it, Madame de Miramion was delighted when he thus pointed out her faults to her. She thanked him in the following terms, which shows the spirit in which she received his advice.

"I received your letter to-day, Reverend Father, and as I opened it, I suspected that it was some advice you were kind enough to give me. Before reading it I went down upon my knees, and asked God to give me the grace to receive it with humility, and to follow it obediently, according to His good pleasure. I have read it again and again, with all the respect and the gratitude that I ought to feel, seeing the great need I have of all that is contained in it. The principal portion—that is to say, the execution—remains to be done, and I ask it from our Lord; I trust in Him, and hope everything from His mercy."

But what shows more than anything else the humility and good-will with which Madame de Miramion was filled, is the rule which she had laid down for every sister of her community that she should ask publicly the favour of being admonished of her faults; and the diligent care with which she herself observed it.

These admonitions, which she received verbally from the sisters, she immediately hastened to write down, in order to have them often before her eyes. We will here mention one or two of the counsels which she received, as, while they reveal the imperfections and weaknesses inherent in human nature, nevertheless make us doubly admire the feeling of penitence which induced her to keep them.

"My sister N—— has warned me that I am not sufficiently cordial with the sisters, and too proud with persons of the world, that I do not pay sufficient attention to the little defects of the community, that I make myself too much feared, that my manner is too imperious, that I am not sufficiently familiar with our sisters, and that I ought to belong more to the community. I am not consistent enough in my character, and in my way of acting. Sometimes a thing suits me, sometimes it does not; sometimes I say one thing, and sometimes another. I show more friendship and esteem for some sisters than for others; and I show too much annoyance at certain faults. I have not enough compassion for the sisters, for their difficulties and their weaknesses; and I have not been sufficiently careful not to find fault with them during recreation; nor admonish them before the other sisters."

After having seen with what humility and submission Madame de Miramion received the least advice from her sisters, we are not surprised to learn that she always directed them with the greatest kindness and

gentleness, and that the good understanding among them was never in the smallest degree impaired. It is true that her greatest anxiety was to preserve peace in her house.

She submitted all the affairs of the community for the deliberation of her council, stated the fact simply, and let each give her opinion. Her great experience often made her see at once the best means to take. But when, in spite of her reasons, the sisters did not share in her opinion, she always accepted that of the majority; and only sought to avert the evils which she foresaw, reserving for herself the reproaches which the public never failed to make her when things went wrong.

CHAPTER XII.

MADAME DE MIRAMION BENEFACTRESS OF FOREIGN MISSIONS.

1682—1684.

I.

THE winter of 1682, having been very long and extremely rigorous, occasioned an increase of misery and suffering among the poorer classes which it was difficult to meet. Madame de Miramion, whose loving heart made her ingenious in inventing fresh means of helping the working classes without wounding their self-love, resolved to distribute from her community kitchen so many portions daily of boiled beef and hot soup, which were sold to them, although much under the real value.

This mode of relief, which has been often imitated since, and has become common in almost all the towns of France, was then a novelty. Several persons of rank, wishing to encourage a work which appeared to them to be so useful, went to visit the buttery of the

"Miramionnes," and tasted the soup; which they then paid for very generously.

The name of only one of these illustrious visitors has been revealed to us by the following letter, that Madame de Miramion, confused at so much honour, thought it necessary to write to her director to inform him of it,—

"The Maréchal de Navaille * sent last evening to ask for 'a portion,' and wishes to dine on Tuesday with me in our little parlour, saying he wants to talk to me about many things at leisure; and afterwards we are to go to Benediction together. I am quite ashamed of the great confidence the general of an army has in a wretched creature like me. I greatly fear that people are deceived in me, they think me much better than I am."

We see by this in what general esteem Madame de Miramion was held, and with what consideration she was treated at Court. But far from being rejoiced at it, she wrote to M. Jolly:

"I have been for some time pained by the applause and praise that I receive from so many persons. I feel that I do not deserve it; however, sometimes it is not disagreeable to a corrupt nature like mine. God often grants me the grace to allow it to

* Philippe de Montault de Bénac, Duc de Navaille, Peer and Maréchal of France, Chevalier of the king's orders, Generalissimo of his armies; married in 1651 to Suzanne de Baudéan de Parabère, a relation of Madame de Maintenon and her godmother; died in 1684. Saint-Simon has justly praised the qualities and virtues of the Duc and Duchesse de Navaille, and Voltaire says, they were the most honest people at Court.

displease me; and always after some reflection I find out the emptiness and folly of these speeches, and even the danger they may entail. In general, through God's mercy, they make little or no impression upon me, and I look upon them as the wind which passes away; or as flies, which annoy me. But for all that, it makes me afraid of myself and of my miserable feelings of vain-glory, and has often made me say to God, 'Is it Thy will, Lord, to abandon me to this gust of pride?' I look upon human praise as a cruel enemy to perfection, and one which I have always dreaded. I have feared this temptation more than any other, because I am naturally proud. I see that this struggle in my mind is great, and increases. I am weak, and have every reason to distrust myself, and although our Lord grants me the grace not to take pleasure always in this praise, yet for all that I cannot help fearing blame and contempt. I have for some time had great distractions in times of prayer or meditation. I cannot fix my thoughts on God, and this makes me very unhappy and discontented with myself. It seems to me that I am a hypocrite: that I appear to be what I am not, and this pains me greatly, as I have always desired a hidden life. I find myself in the opposite condition, for people give me credit for qualities I do not possess; it is true that our Lord does me the honour to make use of me to do good, but I do it so badly and with so little inward disposition or right intention, that I fear this very good will turn to my hurt. I only see one remedy, and that is to withdraw from the world, to go and live in obscurity, unknown to the

world, and only seen by God, and so to finish my days in penitence, humiliation, and continual obedience. Seriously, I do believe that these thoughts come from God; however, I submit them to your judgment."

Madame de Miramion was thus several times tempted no longer to mix herself up with human affairs, and to devote herself entirely to the care of her community.

She felt ashamed of having a carriage, and wished to get rid of it, in order to have a pretext for not leaving her house so often. She spoke of it to M. Jolly: "I am quite unfit for business, and I am overwhelmed with it. People come to fetch me on every side. I am ashamed to be mixed up in so many things. I am to be seen everywhere. I have not a moment to give to God; my neighbours take up all my time; but as Superioress of my community, does not my first duty lie in my convent?"

But M. Jolly reassured her by telling her that as it was not she herself who sought for these outside works, she was conscientiously obliged to occupy herself with those that Providence sent to her; that she was thus accomplishing God's will, and that her carriage being absolutely necessary for these objects, she ought to keep it. The carriage was therefore kept, but much less for her own use, than for the service of public charity.

However, as this dread of applause and her natural taste for solitude came back increasingly to torment her mind, and make her conscience uneasy, she thought the Archbishop of Paris, who was her eccle-

siastical superior, ought to be her judge, and put an end to her uncertainty by an authoritative opinion. She went to see him, explained to him her perplexity, and begged him to decide what she ought to do.

"Madame," said the archbishop, when he had listened attentively to her, and after having asked her several questions, "retirement in a cloister is not suitable for you; the will of God manifests itself clearly in the blessing which He bestows on all the affairs you undertake, and as your archbishop I order you to continue them. As it is your faith alone which has brought you to me, the position that I occupy compels me to speak to you with imperative authority."

"But Monseigneur," she murmured, "I had hoped you would have answered me according to my wishes, and then I should have obeyed you joyfully, without fearing I was unfaithful to my vocation."

However, she submitted to his will, and from that day forth she had but one fear, that of not strictly fulfilling all the duties of her position.

"The less we live according to our own inclination, and the less choice we have in our actions," says Saint François de Sales, "the more excellence and reality there is in our devotion; for it is sometimes necessary to leave our Lord to be agreeable to others for the love of Him."

Such was henceforward the conduct of Madame de Miramion, and if she sometimes appeared to wander away from God, it was only to be more useful to others. She was not satisfied with being pious; she desired, moreover, according to the expression of the

same saint, to make her piety amiable, useful, and agreeable to all.

No doubt she had the gift of making a solitude for herself in her heart, but in her manners in the world there was neither affectation nor mock-modesty. She was everywhere, and with every one, gentle, modest, and cheerful, inspiring all around her with the warmest respect and affection. In her hours of meditation she was fully imbued with the holy presence of God, and with the intimate union of the soul with Him. She seemed as it were surrounded with a holy, living atmosphere, whose beneficent influence acted powerfully upon the souls with whom she was brought in contact. Her expression was sweeter, and her voice more full-toned. All those who came near her experienced in her society a happiness and a satisfaction which it is impossible to express, but which will be understood by those who have had the advantage of knowing a really holy person, and who remember what cheerful gaiety, what tender kindness, and what perfect purity constantly shine in the eyes, the countenance, and, so to speak, in the actions and words of such chosen souls.

II.

Near the end of the year 1682, Madame de Miramion had the misfortune to lose her brother, M. de Bellefond, who lived in the country. As soon as she knew of his illness, she went to stay with him, and lavished on him all the care that affection and religion could inspire. In receiving his last breath she offered to God this new sacrifice of one of the tenderest affec-

tions of her youth, and begged He would use her grief so as to make her advance more rapidly in the path of abnegation and self-denial which she had resolved to follow. For as long as the soul is clothed with a body, it must pass through briars and thorns, and cannot escape the sting of temptation.

On coming back from her brother's death-bed, in the first days of the month of January, 1683, Madame de Miramion, overwhelmed with fatigue, fell ill of a low fever and a severe pain in her side. Inflammation of the lungs soon declared itself, followed by the breaking of a blood-vessel, and in a few hours her life was in the most imminent danger.

Her family and the community were in the greatest consternation, but she herself, "calm in the midst of her sufferings, spoke of eternity with joy, hoping to be soon united with God."

In spite of her own experience in medicine, she gave herself up entirely to the advice of those around her, not even making any reflection upon the remedies proposed by the doctors for alleviating her sufferings. It even seemed as if she had made it a rule to ask for nothing and refuse nothing, but to take everything cheerfully, however fatigued she might be.

Her daughter, the Présidente de Nesmond, who never left her, one day said to her: "I see, dearest mother, that it is to mortify yourself that you ask for nothing, not even for something to drink." "Not being able to do great things for God," she replied, "I must be faithful in small things, my child."

One evening her daughter and her brothers, M. de

Rubelle and M. de Purnon, thinking she was asleep, were speaking in a whisper near her bed. She heard them say that if she recovered from this dangerous illness, they would not allow her to take so much trouble and fatigue, and that they would strive to take better care of her in order to preserve so valuable a life a little longer. "My children," she said, interrupting them, "I belong to God, and not to you nor to myself; if He grants me life, it will be to employ it in His service."

The following Sunday one of the sisters of the community came in a great hurry after mass to tell her that the *curé* had spoken of her in the highest terms in his sermon. But without allowing her to finish, Madame de Miramion called her daughter and said to her: "Do not permit, my dear child, that any one should come and tell me what might give me a good opinion of myself, for we are made up of pride. When the devil cannot get hold of us through despair, he attacks us by vanity. It is a terrible thing to have to give an account to God of our good works; there are so few which have any value in His sight, for so few are done with a perfectly pure intention."

She grew worse, and her doctors despairing of her recovery, the Holy Communion was given to her. The gospel for the day was upon the cure of the man who was born blind. Madame de Nesmond took advantage of it to implore her mother to ask of God to cure her as the blind man did, feeling assured that if she did so it would be granted. "We know," says the Gospel, "that God heareth not sinners; but if any

man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth."

"My daughter," calmly replied Madame de Miramion, "I ask of God to be with Him for eternity; but as to my life, it is in His hands. Let Him do as He wills."

The following day the bad symptoms were aggravated. M. Jolly came to see her, and Madame de Nesmond entreated him to order her mother to ask for her recovery from God. He did so. She obeyed; but before doing so, she said to her daughter: "Promise to allow me to go on as usual, without teasing me about my health; for if God restores it to me, it will not be to take care of it, it will be to employ every moment of it for His glory, and the salvation of souls."

Madame de Nesmond, after having promised, withdrew, and M. Jolly knelt down beside the bed. Their prayer was short. As soon as Madame de Nesmond came back, M. Jolly asked her if she had not some remedy to give to the patient. "Alas! sir," she replied, "a great many have been proposed to us, but in her present state they would be useless."

"Never mind," he replied, "give her something; the moment is come."

She had a medicine given to her composed of nitre and white of eggs; it had been proposed to the doctors, who were not opposed to it, although they thought it useless. Three hours afterwards an abundant perspiration came on, the fever left her, and the doctors declared she was out of danger.

Very often during her illness the whole house had

prayed for the preservation of such a precious life. These desires were granted, and a few days afterwards the patient recovered as if by miracle, and the joy of the whole community was as great as their previous fears. As soon as she could, Madame de Miramion fell back into her old habits, and the only change they could obtain from her was to cease sleeping on a truckle-bed, as she had always done since the age of twenty.

III.

ABOUT this time, Monseigneur Pallu, Bishop of Heliopolis, came back from India. Madame de Miramion, who felt the respect and deference which his apostolical labours at Siam had gained for him from all the world, joyfully took advantage of the presence of this friend of her childhood to submit her plans to him, and ask for his advice on her future conduct.

It was already more than twenty years since Monseigneur Pallu had gone to China, and during this long space of time he had only once returned hurriedly to France, to obtain fresh missionaries. This sojourn had been so short that Madame de Miramion had hardly had time to see him. His journey was, besides, exceedingly unfortunate, for just as he was about to reach China a dreadful tempest drove him to Manilla, in the Philippine Islands, where he was taken by the Spaniards, who sent him back to Europe, but by Mexico. The Abbé de Choisy laughingly said on this occasion that Monseigneur of Heliopolis

was the first to sail round the world by going to the East; the Spaniard, Sebastian Cano, the English Sir Francis Drake, and the Dutch Olivier de Nord, who had sailed round the world before him, having, on the contrary, all gone by the West.

Brought back to France in the beginning of 1683, in consequence of this unlucky voyage, Monseigneur Pallu busied himself actively at Paris in collecting other missionaries and preparing for a fresh departure.

Madame de Miramion, who had the greatest esteem and admiration for the holiness of his life and character, and had the deepest interest in missionary works, wished to give him some Sisters of Sainte Géneviève to take with him to Siam to establish schools for the young girls there. All of them were willing to go, and she herself at their head, hoping there to take part in a new crusade, and conquer more souls for Christ. But the prudent Bishop refused to associate them in the labours and dangers of such a mission before the Christian religion in China could be established on a securer footing. He started alone, and that time arrived without accident at the end of his journey.

Full of gratitude to Madame de Miramion, hardly had he cast anchor than he wrote to her as follows:

"China, 19th January, 1684.

"MADAME,—These few lines are to fulfil the promise I gave you that I would write as soon as I should have arrived safely in this great kingdom. I had only time on landing to send M. Leblanc (one of our missionaries) to Canton, and the other to Fockien and from

thence to the Dominican Fathers. The latter can be back in a month, but I do not expect the other for five or six months. During that time I shall not be idle, and shall begin my mission with my poor self and with our dear Lord. Now, then, you and all the friends of our missions must redouble your good prayers that our holy religion may be firmly established in this great empire. I greet them all in my heart, and remain, yours devotedly, for the glory of our Master,

"FRANCOIS, Bishop of Heliopolis, Vicar Apostolic in China."

But God accepted the good-will of this His faithful servant, and recalled him to Himself before he could see the fulfilment of his painful task. M. Pallu died, worn out with fatigue, in less than one year after his return to China; and his last letter was again to Madame de Miramion, as if he had chosen to address his last earthly thought to the person who had rendered the greatest services to the mission, and for whom he had the highest esteem.

"At Fogan, Province of Fockien, China.
"3rd of December, 1684.

"MADAME,—Providence has permitted for my consolation that an English ship should sail from Siam (where Madame de Miramion had written to him) to China. I received, by this means, long before the usual time, the letter that you did me the honour to write to me in 1682. The holy impressions you derived from the death of your brother, the courage you

showed in going to assist him in his last agony, your anxiety to do all that you think God requires of you, the desire He gives you to consecrate yourself more and more to His service, are all tender proofs of the love He bears you. May He be for ever blessed for it. I assure you, that neither in this world, nor in the other, shall I ever cease to thank Him for it, and to pray that He will continue to pour forth His grace in your heart, where He knows it is not poured forth in vain. I say 'in this world, or in the other,' with all the more reason that I have every reason to believe that in a short time my days will be ended here below. For the last four months my strength has greatly diminished; God warns me to prepare for death, and I am at present so weak that I cannot even write to you myself, as I should wish to express all my gratitude to you for your ceaseless kindness. This letter, written by our dear brother Maigrot, will, however, prove to you how much the remembrance of all the good you have done in support of our Lord's work cheers me; how precious is the thought of your labours of love—a thought which I shall preserve unto death. But after having shown me so much kindness during life, do not forget me in your prayers after my death, the news of which you will probably receive at the same time as this letter. I am entirely yours in our Lord,

"FRANCOIS, Bishop of Heliopolis, Apostolic Vicar of Fockien."

Monseigneur of Heliopolis died a short time afterwards, and M. Lanneau, Vicar of Siam, informed

Madame de Miramion of it by the same post which brought her the holy Prelate's letter. He wrote:

"I should wish to console you for the death of Monseigneur of Heliopolis, which will, I know, give you great pain; but, I confess, you ought rather to console me on this occasion. . . . . In the depth of my sorrow I have, however, felt great joy in seeing how your zeal for this mission increases, even going so far as to consent that some of your Sisters should come to this country. Although I had a great esteem for you, yet I did not think your zeal would have gone so far. Therefore, I should never have thought of proposing it to you. But since you have deigned to suggest this thought to them yourself, I must confess to you it is one of the things that I desire the most. I have had it mentioned to the Princess, the King's only daughter, that she may take them under her protection if they come. She will be very glad to do so, and will help them in everything. . . . . The obligations that all our missions have to you for so many years past, are too great to thank you for them as we ought to do. . . . . However, we shall never fail to pray for you. . . . . I am, and shall be all my life, Madame, your most humble and devoted servant,

"LOUIS, Bishop of Métellopolis, Apostolic Vicar of Siam."

But it was, after all, necessary to give up the idea of sending some Sisters of Sainte Géneviève to China; for, a few years afterwards, this same Bishop of Métellopolis, M. Louis Launeau, had to endure

all the hardships of a violent persecution. He was exposed at the cannon's mouth, and more than once offered himself as a martyr; but neither imprisonment, hunger, thirst, nor tortures could diminish the zeal which had urged him during thirty-five years to labour for the conversion of the heathen.

However, the King of Siam, persuaded by the Jesuits, and by the Catholic missionaries, that nothing could be more advantageous for his vast country than to conclude a commercial treaty with France, made up his mind (at the end of 1684) to send a solemn embassy to Louis XIV., bearing rich presents.

The natural taste that the King had for everything brilliant, was exceedingly flattered by the pompous arrival of this far-distant embassy. Father Tachard, Superior of the Jesuits, who accompanied the Siamese ambassadors, having hinted at Versailles that the Asiatic monarch might perhaps be brought to embrace the Christian religion, the King, misled by his vanity and deceived by this flattering hope, consented to send a magnificent embassy to the King of Siam, composed of two ambassadors, who were accompanied by six Jesuits, eight hundred soldiers, and a great many officers, having as chaplain the Abbé de Choisy, Madame de Miramion's cousin, and who was later her biographer. The King of Siam, flattered by this first pledge of alliance, began by according great privileges to our missionaries. But finally the splendour of these pompous embassies was all that these costly administrations produced on either side.

IV.

MADAME DE MIRAMION had only two brothers left, M. de Rubelle and M. de Purnon. The first only had married, and had been left a widower with an only daughter. This child, received at Sainte Geneviève by her aunt, who loved her like a second mother, had been brought up there with the greatest care, and had become an accomplished young lady, who joined to the advantages of education and fortune the most charming natural gifts. She was remarkably beautiful, very clever, and, above all, very graceful and modest. A portrait of her, painted at that period, and which is yet to be seen at the house of the heirs of M. de Purnon,* has fortunately transmitted to us the faithful likeness of this handsome person. Mademoiselle de Rubelle is represented in full court dress, but a dove which she holds in her hands softens the severity of this costume, and shows her simple taste. For regularity of feature and refinement of expression it is impossible to see anything more agreeable and charming than this portrait. Fair curling hair shades the pure brow, and a face of the most delicate bloom. Very dark brown eyes light up the countenance with so much animation that their attraction is still felt by those who look at her picture.

Seeing her so beautiful and so well suited for the world, her aunt had only one wish, to see her as well

* The Marquis de la Messelière, at the château of Marsay in Poitou.

and as happily married as her good qualities deserved. This desire was satisfied.

"On Monday the 11th of September, 1684," says officially Dangeau's newspaper, "Madame de Miramion married her niece, Mademoiselle Marie Bonneau de Rubelle, to M. Charles Fortin, Marquis de la Hoguette, lieutenant of the king's musqueteers."

This marriage was a very happy one, and M. de la Hoguette, who was as distinguished for his bravery as for his military talent, soon became Lieutenant-General of the king's armies and Governor of Mezierès.*

* M. de la Hoguette was killed in 1693 at the battle of la Marsaille, and only left one daughter, Marie Marguerite, who married Armand de Brichanteau, Marquis de Nangis, Lieutenant-General, in 1725. A portrait of Madame de Nangis, placed near that of her mother in the château of Marsay, represents her as a very pretty blonde with blue eyes.

CHAPTER XIII.

MADAME DE MIRAMION DISTRIBUTOR OF THE KING'S ALMS.

1684—1690.

"Her whole life was an act of faith towards God and an act of charity towards her neighbour."

I.

IT was more than thirty-six years since Madame de Miramion had been carried off by M. de Bussy, and not once during this long space of time had her abductor ventured to appear in her presence.

However, after all these years he needed her assistance in an important lawsuit, upon which a large part of his fortune depended, and of which the Président de Nesmond was judge. But he feared the injury that the remembrance of his outrage to the mother-in-law might do him in the mind of the son-in-law, and so conceived the idea of addressing himself to Madame de Miramion to request her intervention in his favour.

M. de Bussy knew that his friend the Abbé de Choisy was Madame de Miramion's cousin. He took advantage of this friendship, and obtained through him the permission to have a private interview with her. At the end of the year 1684 M. de Bussy was therefore admitted to the presence of her who had been the object of one of the strangest events of his life,—an event whose memory, in spite of the lapse of years, had never ceased to be a subject of pain and shame to him.

Instead of the youthful beauty, sweet and melancholy in expression, slight and elegant in figure, dressed in silk and lace, whom he had carried off at Saint Cloud, he saw a stout lady, her head covered with a black silk hood, dressed in a simple black woollen dress, with a large unplaited lawn frill falling over her shoulders, and upon her bosom a crucifix hanging by a little hair chain—her daughter's hair. Madame de Miramion's eyes had preserved all their brilliancy, and the charms of her countenance had not entirely disappeared in the folds of her double chin. The expression of her features, her carriage, her dress, all was in perfect harmony, and denoted that absence of passions, and inward satisfaction, and, in fact, that quiet and gentle happiness which a pure conscience and the practice of the highest Christian virtues ever produce. She had a singularly calm look and manner, as if no violent passion had ever troubled her soul, and no grief had ever saddened her heart. M. de Bussy was so exceedingly struck by it that he remained almost disconcerted at her appearance. But he was soon

reassured by the amiable manner with which she begged he would be seated, and the attention with which she inquired into his motives for coming to her. When M. de Bussy had given her all the details of the affair, and clearly proved his just right, Madame de Miramion replied that she would speak to her son-in-law and endeavour to influence him in his favour. Judgment followed closely on her promise, and M. de Bussy gained his lawsuit.

The portrait that is given on the frontispiece of this book, and which is from an original painting by De Troy, and the excellent engraving of it by Edelink, represents Madame de Miramion about the time when this interview took place, and just as M. de Bussy saw her; that is, in the austere costume of superioress of the Sisters of Sainte Géneviève.

By examining this portrait closely, especially the painting of De Troy, and seeing her loving smile, the soft bloom of her complexion, and the brilliancy of her eyes, we can still form an idea of the charm she exercised over all who approached her.

Certainly she was no longer the beautiful widow whom Bussy had carried off; her youth had disappeared, but the expression remained, and a peculiar charm

* This portrait, preserved in the château of M. de Purnon, in Poitou, gives, with the real colours, the true likeness of Madame de Miramion, and is full of sweetness and vivacity. Her gray hair suits well her blue eyes so full of kindliness, and her beautifully formed eyebrows add to the brightness of her expression, which the brilliancy of her complexion completes. The hands, which the engraving does not show, have a perfection of form which is traditional in the Bonneau family.

of countenance which is often more attractive than beauty, with that fascination of manner and grace of person for which she was all her life distinguished,—happy gifts which age respects more than any other.

"It was impossible to resist her charity," says Choisy with simplicity; and indeed at every period of her life her solicitations and entreaties, and the steps she took in favour of the poor always met with the same wonderful success. We know, however, that she was never weary of asking, and that her charity never recoiled before any sacrifice, nor her devotedness from any difficulty. It is to this cause alone that we must attribute this sentence that Madame de Maintenon wrote in a moment of ill humour against her old friend: "Madame de Miramion is indiscreet in her zeal."* But it is just also to say that at that moment the fortune of Madame Scarron, who had become governess to the king's children, was improving. Louis XIV., as a reward for the care she had bestowed on the education and health of the Duc de Maine, had just given her the name and estate of Maintenon, and the new Marquise was repairing her château at great expense. Later, when Madame de Maintenon arrived at the summit of her greatness,† when she occupied that position of which Madame de Sévigné says, "The position of Madame de Maintenon is without a parallel in the world; there never was and there never will be one like it," her generosity and benevolence surpassed her fortune, and she com-

* "Letters of Madame de Maintenon," by Lavallée.

† Her secret marriage with Louis XIV.

plained on the contrary of Madame de Miramion's discretion as regards herself. For at all times charity was a necessity for Madame de Maintenon. "My position," she says herself, "has its disagreeable side, but at least it procures me the pleasure of giving."

II.

Two of the leading features in Madame de Miramion's life were the direct leading of God's providence in her actions, and her perfect submission to His will. The following is a fresh proof of this:—

In 1685 she heard that the Reverend Father de Valois,* after having tried the effect in Normandy of retreats for men, which had produced the best result, was going to open in Paris a special house for these exercises. She was at once struck with the benefit that similar retreats might have for women, and immediately formed the plan of doing in her convent for her own sex what the Jesuits were going to do for men.

How many women there are who have not sufficient strength of purpose or habit of prayer to make a retreat of some days by themselves, or to remain shut up in the solitude of their own rooms with pious books, who would yet do it with joy if joined with several others, in a common apartment, to go through the same exercises! The example of

* Louis de Valois, born at Melun in 1639, became the confessor of Louis XIV.'s grandsons, and died at Paris in 1700. He was looked upon as a man of God.

the more fervent would excite the zeal of all. Madame de Miramion felt that many young girls who would not venture to go by themselves into a convent for fear of attracting attention, would do it without hesitation if there were at Paris a special house for retreats, approved of by the king, and where several persons of the upper classes could retire without ostentation or distinction between them.

The more she considered the use of such an institution, the more her desire increased of providing this fresh means for the improvement of all classes of society.

Unfortunately a number of objections and difficulties presented themselves which her prudence and experience did not allow her to conceal. It was necessary to obtain the king's permission, the approbation of the archbishop, and the consent of the Sisters of Sainte Géneviève. The community had not sufficient room for the public exercises, and still less for lodging the number of persons who might desire to join them. It must then be enlarged, some neighbouring house must be obtained, probably at a great expense, and prepared and furnished for this object. How was she to meet so heavy an expense? Her own fortune could no longer suffice: although it had been very considerable, thirty years of incessant charity and liberality had almost exhausted it.

These difficulties greatly pre-occupied Madame de Miramion, and anyone else in her position would have been discouraged. But the fear of resisting the will of God through selfishness or weakness, determined her, on the contrary, to persist in her plan, convinced

that Providence, if such were its purpose, would reward her obedience by smoothing away all obstacles.

Madame de Maintenon, to whom she mentioned it first, greatly encouraged her to persevere, and promised that she would herself make known to the king so praiseworthy a plan, and support it with all her influence.

The king, far from refusing his approbation, said he should be very much pleased at it; that with Madame de Miramion there was nothing to fear, that he was sure of her, and that he wished to contribute to a scheme which would certainly promote God's glory. With this approval he sent her six thousand francs.*

The sisters of the community, whom she had feared to find hostile to the plan, on account of the numerous good works with which they were already burdened, accepted it eagerly. And, to conclude, the Archbishop of Paris not only approved of it without difficulty, but also permitted, as a mark of his particular esteem for Madame de Miramion, that the chapel of the house should be honoured with the perpetual presence of the Blessed Sacrament.†

Providence seemed, in fact, to smooth beforehand every difficulty, and to dispose every one favourably. The idea of these Retreats was hardly conceived, than it was at once, so to say, realised. Every one to whom she spoke about it offered their assistance. The Duchesse de Guise, the Présidente Voisin, and Madame du Housset, who wished to be associated in all the good works of their charitable friend, each

* Choisy and Dangeau.

† See the Letters of Madame de Miramion in the Appendix.

gave her six thousand francs. Madame de Miramion gave fifteen thousand, and several other persons who desired to remain incognito, sent her considerable sums.

She bought of Mgr. François de Nesmond (Bishop of Bayeux, her son-in-law's uncle), for the sum of eighty thousand francs, a large house situated upon the Quai de la Tournelle, which adjoined the community on one side, and her daughter's hôtel on the other. She had a fine hall built for the religious exercises of the retreatants, a large refectory, and a chapel containing several confessionals. The upper stories were divided into fifty bedrooms, which were very simply furnished, but with the most scrupulous neatness.

During all the time that these preparations were being made, Madame de Miramion saw to everything herself. But her order and economy did not prevent the total expense of this new house amounting to more than a hundred thousand francs,—an enormous sum at a period when war and dearth had made money so scarce.

III.

IN the month of October of that same year, 1685, Louis XIV., whom victory rendered daily more despotic, published the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes; an unfortunate act by which he withdrew from the Protestants all the privileges they had formerly obtained, and which till then they had been allowed to enjoy in peace. The king, inflamed with religious zeal, con-

sidered that, in order to prevent the frequent insurrections excited by the Huguenots in the kingdom, it was necessary to take from them the right of exercising their religion. But in order to arrive at this result rigorous measures were employed in his name, which neither policy nor religion can excuse.* This prince had, it is true, resorted to an expedient which is often found efficacious—money. And Pélisson was charged by him with this secret mission.

The king paid at the same time a large number of missionaries out of his privy purse, to go into the provinces and endeavour by persuasion to bring back the Protestants to the religion of their ancestors; and afterwards lavished honours and favours on the new converts.

Madame de Maintenon,† who knew better than any one that severity and violence are the worst possible means for gaining hearts or convincing men of error, brought several young Protestant ladies to the Miramionnes, having no doubt that the loving gentleness and wisdom of their superior, and the persuasive eloquence of her piety, would soon bring them over to the Catholic religion. This plan was most successful; and she had the happiness of seeing several of these young persons become, and continue all their lives, perfect models of Catholic virtue and piety. The Duc of Saint-Simon in his Memoirs mentions one of them, Mademoiselle de Montboucher du Bordage,

* Languet de Gergy.

† All the family d'Aubigné were Protestant, and Madame de Maintenon herself had been so in her youth.

who afterwards married M. de Coigny, and whose piety edified the whole Court.

But as the greater number of these young ladies were then in the greatest pecuniary distress, Madame de Miramion was obliged to ask M. Pélisson to give them pensions, which was granted her, the king having said publicly, "that she might be trusted, and that her charity was always prudent."*

Unfortunately to this mode of making conversions, Louvois, either following his own bent, or because he sought to flatter his master,† joined others of extreme severity and cruelty, to which we need not refer here, but the result of which was to oblige a great many families to leave the kingdom.

It was in vain that the prisons and the galleys were filled with persons arrested in their flight. Nothing could conquer the resistance of these unfortunate people, who were only strengthened in their faith by the torments they were made to suffer.

The fortress of La Tournelle, which formerly existed on the quay of that name at Paris, between the port Saint-Bernard and the Seine, almost opposite the Miramionnes, was then over-crowded with these unfortunate Protestants. In ordinary times it only served as a prison for sick galley-slaves; but since the revocation of the edict, all the emigrants who were surprised in their flight, or relapsed, were thrown there until they could be transported to Marseilles. The greater number of them were infirm old people,

* Choisy. † Languet de Gergy.

who were kept chained by the neck, and suffered all kinds of privations.

The sight of so much cruelty, and such great misfortune, was most painful to Madame de Miramion's generous heart. The only relief she had was in going each day to lavish on these unhappy people, all the assistance that humanity and Christian love could suggest. Like her first guide, Saint Vincent de Paul, she strove to help all who suffered without inquiring as to their faith, and stretched forth an eager hand to all around her, impelled by one feeling only—Divine charity.

At the end of December, God, who from time to time tried Madame de Miramion by natural afflictions, re-called to Himself M. de Caumartin, Counsellor of State, and her husband's cousin, who had formerly solicited her hand with so much eagerness.

This loss was very painful to her; they had preserved for each other the warmest friendship and esteem: they often met, and always with pleasure. M. de Caumartin, after having had all his life the most sincere admiration and the deepest respect for her, wished before he died to give her a last proof of his affection; and by his will ordered his children never to do anything without consulting Madame de Miramion, which they always did, as much from affection as from obedience.

IV.

IN the month of January, 1687, Mademoiselle de Marsilly, Madame de Miramion's cousin,* who had been for many years the Superioress of the Sisters of the General Hospital, resigned her functions, which her advanced age and infirmities no longer allowed her to perform. The governors, wishing to avert the evils which this change of direction might cause, came to entreat Madame de Miramion to come and spend a few days in that establishment in order to maintain in it the good order she had formerly introduced there.

Madame de Miramion was then fifty-eight, and since her last illness she had remained weaker and more ailing than before; but neither age nor failing health had diminished the ardour of her charity, or the activity of her life. If there were some good to be done she did it, and so for three months she remained in the hospital, continually helping Mademoiselle Pantaclin, the new Superioress, by her experience and advice.

As soon as she arrived, she submitted herself to all the rules of the house, like the most humble sister, not choosing to be treated differently from the nuns who

* She was the sister of the Marquis de Marsilly, whose daughter Marie Claire Deschamps de Marsilly (a young lady endowed with every gift of mind and body, but without any fortune) was adopted by Madame de Miramion, who placed her at Saint Cyr, from 1686 to 1690, and married her on the 3rd of April, 1695, to the Marquis de Villette, Madame de Maintenon's cousin.

served the poor, and being the first to give them the example of the most painful sacrifices.

O courage touchant ! ces tendres bienfaitrices,
Dans un séjour infect où sont tous les supplices,
De mille êtres souffrants prévenant les besoins,
Surmontent les dégoûts des plus pénibles soins ;
Du chanvre salutaire entourent leurs blessures,
Et reperént ce lit témoin de leurs tortures,
Ce déplorable lit, dont l'avare pitié
Ne prête à la douleur qu'une étraite moitié.
De l'humanité même elles semblent l'image ;
Et les infortunés que leur bonté soulage
Sentent avec bonheur, peut-être avec amour,
Qu'une femme est l'ami qui les ramène au jour.*

On returning home, Madame de Miramion was grieved to learn that her best and oldest friend, Mademoiselle de Lamoignon, was dying. Old age was her only illness, so that she felt she must resign herself to her loss. Her only consolation was to assist her in her last moments, and to attend herself to her funeral. Oh human friendship, devoted, patient, undemonstrative ! who can tell all thou hast borne of anguish and pain by dying beds ?

The loss of a person so endeared to her by relationship, affection, and above all by similarity of tastes, left in the heart of Madame de Miramion a blank which nothing could ever replace. For forty years they had walked together in the same path of piety and charity. Of all the pious women whom we have seen in the course of this history taking part in the charitable associations formed by Saint Vincent de

* Legouvé, *Mérité des Femmes.*

Paul, of all those who had formerly taken our young widow by the hand, and introduced her into the consoling path of charity, Mademoiselle de Lamoignon was the only one then surviving. She was the last of her old friends, and in losing her, her past life became as it were extinct. It is often thus in life. In the morning all is smiling, friends stretch forth their hands to us and walk gaily by our side; in the evening all have disappeared, and the painful journey must be finished alone.

The king on hearing of the death of Mademoiselle de Lamoignon, who had been for some time the ordinary distributor of his alms, asked Madame de Miramion, through Madame de Maintenon ("Reason speaking by the mouth of the Graces," as Fénelon said of her), if she would kindly replace her friend in this employment, and, above all, in his confidence.*

Such an honour, and above all such an opportunity of doing more good, were not to be refused. Madame de Miramion accepted it joyfully. From that day until her death the king sent her money regularly four times a year, but without ever permitting her to give him any account of it.

Boileau, who had for a long time been in the habit of going every day to read his poetry at the house of the Président de Lamoignon, where he had learned to know and to admire the rare qualities of the worthy sister of this pious magistrate, wrote this just praise of Mademoiselle de Lamoignon underneath her portrait.

Aux sublimes vertus nourrie dans sa famille,
Cette admirable et sainte fille

* Choisy.

En tous lieux signale son humble piété ;
Jusqu'aux climats où naît et finit la clarté,*
Fit retentir l'effet de ses soins secourables ;
Et jour et nuit, pour Dieu pleine d'activité,
Consuma son répos, ces biens et sa santé
A soulager les maux de tous les misérables.

V.

Two years had passed since Madame de Miramion had begun to prepare a house for retreats ; two years employed in "praying, in asking advice, and putting everything in order," says Choisy. At last the house being ready, she drew up certain rules for it, together with a plan for the order of the public exercises. The retreats for ladies of the world were to take place twice a year, and only to last seven days, during which time fifty persons could obtain board and lodging in the house by paying for it. But the exercises intended for the middle classes and the poor were to open four times a year, and only last five days ; but the women who came from the country alone were to sleep in the house, the others being able to return home every evening, which allowed her to find room for a hundred and twenty at a time, and to board them all gratuitously. And as the Gospel tells us that the poor hold the first place in the esteem of Jesus Christ, Madame de Miramion chose to begin

* She had greatly contributed to the support of the missionaries in India, and had in her house a great store of clothes, which she sold for the benefit of the natives.

with them, in order to draw down a greater blessing from Heaven upon these retreats.

On Christmas Day, 1687, a great number arrived, whom she received with open arms, as so many chosen souls on whom she had no doubt the Divine mercy would be abundantly poured forth.

She refused no one, and when she was told that women of scandalous life were among the number, "So much the better," she replied; "retreats are given for those who have sinned; perhaps God will touch their hearts." And indeed she saw such wonderful and effectual conversions, that if she had only gained this one result from her past labours she would have considered herself as being repaid a hundredfold.*

One day, Madame de Miramion, seeing a young girl who had seemed much moved during the retreat, weep on leaving the house, asked her why she was so afflicted. "Alas, Madame!" she replied, "I have asked God's forgiveness, and I am going to begin to offend Him again, as I have no other means of living." She was touched with this reply, and, remembering the look of mercy which Jesus had deigned to let fall upon repentant sinners, she kept her with her, and some years afterwards had the satisfaction of making a good nun of her.

The retreat for ladies in the world took place immediately afterwards, and Father de Valois opened it with the zeal and fervour which accompanied all his actions. The Abbé Tiberge, and the Abbé de Brisa-

* Choisy.

cier,* both of them noted for their great talents and austere life, preached the retreat which followed.

They were not studied or eloquent sermons, but simple, earnest words, which they uttered under the inspiration of the Spirit of God; and without seeking to please, they only endeavoured to touch the hearts of their audience. Madame de Miramion saw palpable proofs of it; ladies brought her their earrings, necklaces, and rings to give to the poor,† "thus carrying the love of God to the contempt of self, which is the life of Christianity, after having perhaps carried the love of self so far as to despise God, which is the life of the world," says Saint Augustine.

Such was the auspicious beginning of this good work. And for more than a century this house of retreat, initiated by Madame de Miramion's untiring energy and generosity, continued to render the same services, and offer the same advantages to women of all classes. Destroyed by the revolution, and by the dispersion of the Sisters of Sainte Géneviève, this work has fortunately been revived in our days and often imitated in other places.

The building upon the Quai de la Tournelle on one side of the Hôtel de Nesmond still exists, and forms a fine mansion built at the bottom of a court with all the magnificence and regularity of Louis the Fourteenth's style. The apartments, all wainscoted with rich wood-work, still show a loftiness and a size very different from the niggard proportions of our own

* Louis Tiberge, and Jacques Charles de Brisacier, preacher and almoner of the Queen Marie Thérèse, were one after the other Superiors of the Seminary of the Foreign Missions.

† Choisy.

time. A large garden stretched behind, which communicated with that of the community of the Miramionnes, and the sides of which, planted with large lime-trees, led by a private passage to the church of Saint Nicolas. The large door-way which closed the court-yard on the side of the quay appears to have remained such as it then was. Only the inscription over the door now indicates that it is the "*central pharmacy of the Paris hospitals.*" Thus, although time has changed the object of its first destination, Providence has at least permitted that Madame de Miramion's house should still be used for a benevolent and charitable institution.

VI.

AT the very time when this great work of retreats had been crowned with success, and when Madame de Miramion could rejoice in the good she had done, and count over the number of erring souls she had contributed to bring back to the paths of virtue, the evil spirit was seeking in the dark to make use of her innocent means to introduce doubts in the faith at Saint Cyr—that sanctuary which Madame de Maintenon had so laboriously raised to the glory of God.

This community, where nothing was talked of but piety, and the very air breathed fervour and the love of God, could only be seduced by holy and pious appearances; and it was by these means that the devil endeavoured to corrupt an establishment where the

purest virtue reigned—at the very doors of a court which was the scene of the greatest vices.

Quietism, in fact, under the mask of piety, and the purest love of God, was then spreading itself throughout the world, and while this new heresy, sown by Molinos, was awakening the vigilance of the Vicar of Jesus Christ at Rome, it crept into France through the artifice of a woman who was herself carried away by the apparent devotion of a Barnabite monk. This lady, Madame Guyon, was endowed by nature with every kind of fascination—grace, beauty, and wit. Her countenance had a melancholy and dreamy expression, which unconsciously prepossessed people even before she spoke; and her intelligence, cleverness, and vivacity, excited people's imagination to a dangerous degree.

She was the daughter of a gentleman of Montargis, and from her childhood had shown feelings of deep piety; but it was, above all, after the death of her husband (son of the rich constructor of the Briare Canal) that she had rushed headlong into the practices of an ecstatic devotion. Her constant assiduity at church, her frequent communions, the abundant alms which her large fortune allowed her to distribute, had gained for her general esteem, and little by little she won the affection of the Duchesses of Beauvilliers, de Chevreuse, and de Mortemart, all three daughters of Colbert, and eminent for their piety.

We need not narrate here how Madame Guyon, having chosen for her director a monk imbued with the mystical maxims of the Quietists, who completely took possession of her excitable mind, was conducted

by him to Annecy, to Turin, and to Grenoble. When they arrived together at Paris, they held meetings, in which they made numerous proselytes, principally among the pious persons of the Court. Madame Guyon, after having written several little books of an exceedingly mystic and exaggerated nature, which fascinated by the easiness of their style, and their apparent devotion, also chose to prophesy. The Church was troubled at these dangerous doctrines, and denounced them to the Court. Father Lacombe was shut up in the château of Lourdes, and Madame Guyon conducted, by the king's order, to the convent of the Visitation, in the Rue Saint Antoine.

Her submission, her abnegation, and the apparent holiness of her life during all the time she was imprisoned there, caused her to be looked upon by those around her as a saint who was unjustly persecuted, and who supported that persecution with an heroic patience. She became, in fact, the edification, the darling, and the delight of the monastery which served as her prison.

It was then that Madame de Miramion, who often went to Sainte Marie, heard of Madame Guyon for the first time.

She saw her and was charmed with her; for devotion has its seductions and its imprudences like every other feeling. She interceded for her with Madame de Maintenon. Madame de la Maisonfort, mistress of Saint Cyr, the Duchesse de Béthune, the Duchesse de Beauvilliers and her sisters (all friends and proselytes of the interesting captive) joined in the same request.

Madame de Maintenon, at the prayer of so many irreproachable Catholics, asked for and obtained from the king, Madame Guyon's liberty.

The relations between Madame de Miramion and this extravagant lady were, however, confined to this one interview, and this one charitable action. Besides, Madame de Miramion's faith was not less simple than it was hearty. God in His goodness has permitted that some souls should turn instinctively to Him in all the difficulties of life, as the magnet turns to the north pole in the midst of the ocean. And, therefore, in the famous questions of Jansenism and Quietism which troubled in so many ways the tranquillity of this period, the only part she took was to obey the Church.

Madame Guyon, as soon as she was set free, hastened to Versailles to thank Madame de Maintenon, who, carried away in her turn by her wonderful fascination, introduced her at Saint Cyr as a model of piety, eloquence, and grace. It is well known what harm her maxims soon did in this pious house, and what a great deal of trouble it gave to Madame de Maintenon (enlightened too late by Bossuet, and influenced by the king, who could not bear the shadow of a schism) to eradicate the taste for spiritualism and mysticism which had taken possession of the most superior minds at Saint Cyr.

This royal house of education, where the *élite* of the daughters of the nobility in France were gathered together, under the patronage of Madame de Maintenon, was then in all its splendour. Its influence had already revived the taste for intellectual occupa-

tion, and in order to satisfy it, Madame de Maintenon asked Racine, who had given up writing for the theatre, to compose a tragedy which could be represented by the young ladies of Saint Cyr. Perhaps, also, she hoped that the novelty of this spectacle might divert for a moment the melancholy disposition of a king who was becoming "*inamusable*." She wished for a subject taken from the Bible. Racine composed "Esther," and it is impossible not to admire the way in which he has treated the subject. He himself distributed the different parts to the pupils, and taught them to declaim them. Splendid Persian costumes were made, ornamented with precious stones. The theatre was set up in a large hall, and the king lent his band. When all was ready, Madame de Maintenon invited the king to assist at the first representation, which took place on the 26th of January, 1689.

This tragedy had a universal success; people chose by flattery to recognise "Esther" in Madame de Maintenon, and by malice "Vashti" in Madame de Montespan, "Haman" in M. de Louvois, and the Huguenots (persecuted by him) in the proscription of the Hebrews.

"But as this play was of a pious nature," wrote the ladies of Saint Cyr in their memorial, "persons of grave professions made no objection to assist at it, and there were many to whom Madame de Maintenon was happy to afford this pleasure."

On the occasion of the second representation, which took place three days after the first (that is to say, on the 29th of January, 1689), the king invited several pre-

lates, among whom were Bossuet, the Bishop of Beauvais, M. de Forbin Janson, and eight Jesuits. Madame de Maintenon, on her side, begged Madame de Miramion to be present, and although she had not been to the play since her aunt took her there against her will, she thought it her duty to accept this flattering invitation.

"We are going to perform to-day for the saints," wrote Madame de Maintenon in the morning, making allusion to this pious audience.

The king arrived at three o'clock, and the tragedy began at once. All the young ladies of Saint Cyr were placed in ranks on one side, on benches raised in an amphitheatre; on the other side were the ladies of the community, in full choir costume; in the middle, before the stage, the king in an arm-chair, and at his side, but a little behind him and on a lower seat, Madame de Maintenon; behind them Monsieur, the princes, and the court.

"The king and all the court are enchanted with the tragedy of 'Esther,'" wrote Madame de Sévigné; "Madame de Miramion and eight Jesuits, among whom was Father Gaillard, honoured the last representation with their presence. It is really a *chef-d'œuvre* of Racine; if I were a devotee, I should much wish to see it."

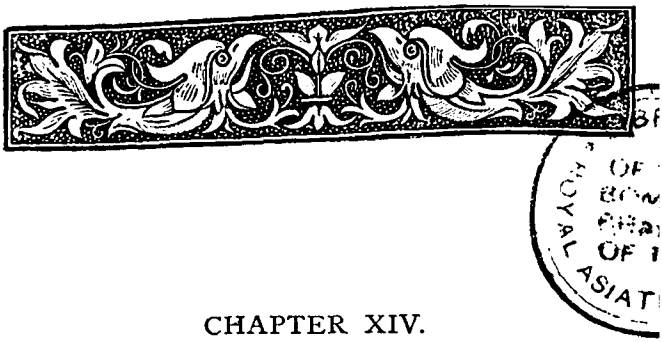
The desire of the Marquise was fortunately satisfied, and these are the terms in which she relates this event to her daughter:

"I paid my respects the other day to Saint Cyr, and it passed off more agreeably than I expected. We went there on Saturday—Madame de Coulanges, Madame de Bagnols, the Abbé Testu,

and I. We found our places reserved. An officer said to Madame de Coulanges that Madame de Maintenon had kept a seat for her near herself. See what an honour! 'As for you, Madame,' he said, 'you can choose your place.' I placed myself with Madame de Bagnols on the second bench behind the Duchesses. The Maréchal de Bellefond came and placed himself on my right hand; and before me were Madame d'Auvergne, Madame de Coislin, and Madame de Sully. The Maréchal and I listened to this tragedy with an attention which surprised some of the audience. I cannot tell you how charming this play is. It is a thing which it is not easy to describe; a combination of music, poetry, singing, and persons, so complete and so perfect that it leaves nothing to be desired. The young ladies, who act the part of the King, and the other personages, are made for it. The only regret one can possibly have is when such a charming play comes to an end.

"And, indeed, everything in this representation,—the choice company, the character of the place, the beauty of the versification, the imposing majesty of the King, the sight of all these young girls, and the singular mixture of the court and the cloister—all concurred to form a picture which cannot fade, and which has remained in the imagination of all the spectators as one of the most charming episodes of a reign which so happily united greatness, simplicity, and genius."*

* "Histoire de Madame de Maintenon," by the Duc de Noailles.



CHAPTER XIV.

MADAME DE MIRAMION'S RELATIONS WITH THE COURT.

1690—1696.

"The love of God inspired all her words, and gave them a strange power over every heart."—*Choisy, Madame de Miramion's Life.*

I.

"NO ONE ever had more skill and tact than Madame de Miramion for arranging difficulties; the most apparently hopeless affairs succeeded in her hands, and God gave to all sorts of persons such great confidence in her judgment that each and all were willing to intrust to her the care of their interests."*

Distributor of the King's Alms, continually sent for to Versailles by Madame de Maintenon, who insisted on having her share in every charity, Madame de Miramion, in spite of her modesty, was known, esteemed and sought for by every person about the Court.

* Choisy.

All those who strove to mitigate the evils which afflict humanity, thought it impossible to accomplish their benevolent intentions without her participation. The princesses envied the poor to whom she devoted herself; they asked for her advice in all their troubles, and implored her presence and her prayers above all in their last moments. She it was who one day seeing an angry father refuse to pardon one of his children, threw herself on her knees before him, and by her humility stayed the curse which was about to fall from his lips, and induced him to forgive his son. Everywhere, in the house of the nobleman as well as in the home of the humblest of the people, her presence was hailed as a blessing and her advice received as a command.

"I often wonder," she said herself on this subject, "at the way in which things arrange themselves. I don't know what to say to reconcile people, and I do not know why they come to seek me; but in some marvellous way or other things come straight, and God makes use of a weak instrument like myself to bring about peace. As He permits that it should be so, let us fulfil His designs, for all tends to His greater glory."

This success was not so much on account of her eloquence as of her piety towards God, which appeared in all her words; and as "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," the main subject of her conversation was Him who was the only object of her love. She spoke with much natural grace, and made a deep impression upon the minds of those who listened to her. In her presence the husband forgave

his wife, the mother her daughter. Her entreaties were irresistible; hearts were softened, and it became a common saying that whenever Madame de Miramion came into a house peace followed.* It was not that she liked to make herself of importance or to mix herself up in family quarrels; on the contrary, she never sought to meddle in other people's affairs, and only undertook them against her will and when Providence seemed to force them upon her. She then listened quietly to all the parties concerned, let them give their reasons without ever interrupting them, although she often saw at a glance where the difficulty lay, and while they were adding useless words she was seeking from God the means of arranging everything, and always found a *dénouement.*

Among the persons of the court with whom Madame de Miramion had frequent relations of charity we may name the Princesses de Condé, de Conti, and d'Harcourt; the Duchesses de Longueville, d'Aiguillon, d'Aumont, de Guise, de Vendôme et de Retz; the Marquises de Maintenon, de Sablé, de Marans, and de Magnelay, of whom her biographer has not thought it necessary to speak.

Madame de Montespan, who, since the marriage of her daughter, Mademoiselle de Blois, with the Duc d'Orleans, no longer appeared at court, and often withdrew to the convent of the sisters of Saint Joseph at Paris, sometimes sent for her also to see if a conversation about God could make her forget or be indifferent to creatures. Madame de Montespan then

* Choisy.

kissed Madame de Miramion, often weeping very much, but her tears were tears of weakness and despair, and not yet of penitence."* Later, when she shut herself up in her country house at Oiron far away in Poitou, repentance came and she gave all she had to the poor, making their coarse clothes herself and often dressing their wounds. She founded a hospital in her house, where she established a great many old people, of whom she was rather the servant than the superior; only asking them in return to pray to God for her. She likewise inflicted numerous penances upon herself, believing she could never do enough to obtain from God the pardon of her sins. This people are ignorant of, when they speak of "the proud favourite," and it as well that they should know it, for her own honour as well as for that of morality.*

The Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur de Harlay de Chanvalon, a prelate of much wit and learning, but who had unfortunately been somewhat wild in his youth, was exceedingly fond of Madame de Miramion's society, and often came to call upon her. At the request of the Président de Harlay, the prelate's brother, she received him willingly, and had the satisfaction, through the fervour of her zeal, of inspiring Monseigneur de Harlay with a sincere contrition for his past faults.

Her director, seeing her thus almost continually occupied with other people's interests, feared she

* Memoirs of the Abbé de Choisy.

† "Madame de Maintenon," by M. de Noailles.

might be carried away by so much success, and wrote to her :—

"Madame, not only do you succeed in reconciling enemies and making up the most difficult misunderstanding, but persons who hold high ecclesiastical dignities weep for their faults at your exhortation.* You have been chosen to turn them aside from the riches and pleasures offered by the devil and to induce them to serve God alone. Are you sufficiently humble, Madame, to support all this without prejudice to your own soul? This fear came upon me yesterday after having been witness of the proposal made to you, and I thought you would allow me to tell you of my fears, although the doing so gives me pain."

"Oh, Father," she says in her reply, "why should it grieve you to be charitable to the person who honours you the most, and who feels all possible gratitude for the favour you do her?" And she thanks M. Jolly from the bottom of her heart for the advice he is so kind as to give her, begging of him to continue to warn her of all he may see to find fault with in her.†

* An allusion to the repentance of the Archbishop of Paris.

† These letters, too long to be given here entirely, will be found in the Appendix, where they will prove edifying to all pious souls.

II.

WHEN Madame de Miramion felt her strength give way and her body ready to sink with fatigue, she went to rest herself for some days in a country house called Coubron, which she had in the village of Ivry, at half a league from Paris. She had purchased it for ten thousand francs, and had spent about as much again on it in order to prepare it for the service of the community to whom she gave it. The sick nuns were sent there, and as the garden was large and well-cultivated it was a great advantage to their house in Paris. It was there, far from the tumult of life, and the importunity of the world, that Madame de Miramion liked to follow her heart's inclinations, and give herself for a few days entirely to God.

"Her extraordinary virtues proceeded from the solid foundation of an interior life which God by His grace had given her, and which she had cultivated by the faithful exercise of prayer and contemplation, whereby her soul had been raised into the most sublime heights of religion. From the time she was nine years of age she spent every morning an hour in meditation; and far from being weary of this exercise, 'in which,' says Saint Theresa, 'the soul converses with God alone, and is never weary of expressing her love to Him by whom she knows herself to be beloved,' she had so much inclination for it that she afterwards confessed that it would be difficult for her to express how happy it made her feel. Even as a child God led her by the

hand and taught her that prayer is a perfume which evaporates when it is too much exposed to the air; and a favour from heaven which it is well to hide, because the world is neither worthy to experience it nor capable of respecting it in others." *

From the age of eighteen she had begun to give herself every day a religious subject on which to meditate for an hour. It was generally a portion of the Gospel, and she found in it an inexhaustible source of pure and tender reflections, all of which raised her thoughts to God. When she was one-and-twenty she was permitted, at her own request, to get up for an hour every night to pray and meditate upon her knees. This was from two to three o'clock in the morning, and did not prevent her from consecrating to this exercise another hour at seven o'clock, and a third in the evening, which she generally spent in church before the blessed Sacrament. She observed this rule to the end of her life; only after fifty she was ordered, on account of her infirmities, to sit up in bed to pray during the night instead of getting up to do it on her knees.

The more time she devoted to prayer, the more she clung to God with her whole heart. She was directed by a holy priest, who led her, as it were, by the hand, and whose guidance she followed with the docility of a child. God, who destined her for great things, and who intended her to walk in the highest paths, inspired her with a holy horror for everything extraordinary.

What was perhaps the most wonderful thing about

* Choisy.

her was, that in the midst of so many different occupations, and in proportion as her hours of prayer became more and more interrupted by distractions and annoyances, she resolved with all the more courage, never to give up or relax in this practice. The presence of God showed itself in all her actions, and in the midst even of the close attention which her multifarious good works required of her. It may indeed be said of her, as of Saint Theresa, that "she was as much occupied with the Divine presence in her actions, as in her prayers."

She was fond of method in small things as in great ones, arranging minutely beforehand the employment of her time, and leaving nothing to chance; so that every moment was well employed, and nothing left undone.

III.

DURING nearly thirty years the house of Sainte Pélagie, that asylum which had been opened for penitents, thanks to the great zeal and charity of Madame de Miramion, had maintained itself in the exact observance of its primitive rule: but in 1692, the discipline of this establishment became relaxed, and its pious foundress had the regret of seeing that the girls no longer lived in those sentiments of humility and penitence which their position required of them. She spoke about it to Madame de Maintenon, and obtained the king's permission to create within the walls of the same building, but separated from it, a new establishment, to be entirely under her control, with a superioress of her order to direct it. Her plan was to

receive there only those young women who were willing to live in a real state of sorrow for the past. No sooner had she opened this refuge, than so edifying a spectacle was presented of penance, silence and mortification, and the number of penitents so greatly increased, that Madame de Miramion was obliged to remove them into a much larger house, which was called the House of the Mother of God. Under her watchful care, these poor Magdalenes led such pious and exemplary lives, that the governors of the refuge came to implore Madame de Miramion to desire her penitents to go and live with the others in the old house of Saint Pélagie, in order that their example might influence the rest. She joyfully consented, and in spite of the danger of such a prompt re-union, the success was complete. The good direction and the wise rules she had given to this establishment were faithfully observed there until the transformation of this house in 1789.*

In the beginning of the year 1693, the Président de Nesmond, her son-in-law, who had shown her for thirty years all the tenderness of a son, was suddenly taken ill. "This illness did not at first appear serious; but as he was very pious, he had established a rule in his house, that no one in it should have the fever for three days without accomplishing all the duties of the Catholic faith. He wished to set the example himself, and received all the Sacraments, although the

* The house of refuge called Sainte Pélagie, instituted by Madame de Miramion in 1665, between the Rue Puits-l'Hermite and the Rue Copeau, has been transformed into a prison since the revolution.

physicians declared that he was not in danger. However, that same evening he became delirious, and died the following day.

"Madame de Miramion felt her son-in-law's death greatly, but endeavoured to console her daughter, who was utterly overwhelmed by the blow of losing a husband whom she so tenderly loved."*

The whole of that year was a time of grief and mourning for her, for after having shared in her daughter's sorrow, she found herself called upon to console her niece.

On the 3rd of October, 1693, the Marquis de la Hoguette, lieutenant-general of the king's forces, governor of Mézières (who had married Mademoiselle Bonneau de Rubelle), was killed while fighting gloriously, under the eyes of the Maréchal de Catinat, at the battle of Marsaille, near Turin.† This loss, and the analogy of the circumstances, painfully brought back to poor Madame de Miramion all the grief she had felt at the death of her brother, M. de Tracy, killed, like her nephew, at the moment of victory, and just at the moment when his services were about to be recompensed by the king.

The winter of 1694 was again extremely rigorous. God seemed to will that France should again be tried by all the horrors of famine, and at the same time by

* Choisy.

† The battle took place on the 4th of October, 1693, at Marsaille, in Piedmont, near Pignerol and Turin, between the French troops commanded by Catinat and those of Savoy. They fought with such fury that whole batallions fell on the field of battle.

pestilential diseases of every kind. The crops of 1692 had been entirely spoiled by the rain, and those of 1693 were utterly lost. Wheat failed in several provinces, and whole villages went into the towns to seek for food. It was most distressing to see Paris inundated with a crowd of weeping poor positively dying of hunger.*

Madame de Miramion, in spite of her increasing infirmities, of her daily diminishing strength, and a sudden weakness which often compelled her to stop short in the midst of her numerous occupations, gathered up the remainder of her strength and redoubled her zeal, in order to provide for the necessities of this deplorable winter.

After having been all her life the mother of the poor, and having looked closer than any one else into the cause of the sufferings of the people, she undertook to be their advocate. She went and spoke for them to the minister, to Madame de Maintenon, and even to the king himself, "begging them to buy provisions of rice abroad as a substitute for wheat, which then cost fifty francs the 'septier.'† This was done at her request, and the king, after having given a large quantity away, had the rest sold at a very low price."

"You are always ready of invention," wrote Madame de Maintenon to Monceau, her steward; "see if pease, beans, milk, oatmeal, if, I say, something cannot be found as a substitute for bread, which is so dear. . . .

* Memoirs of the Marquis de Sourches.

† Which has been replaced by the "hectolitre."

Strive to keep up their courage, and induce them to work."*

At the same time she deprived herself of every thing, and sold her horses and her rings in order to supply their need.

In spite of all the efforts of private benevolence, the misery increased, and the mortality became general. There were more than six thousand sick persons at the Hôtel Dieu. Madame de Miramion was there continually. Seeing as many as twelve persons in one bed, ill from different complaints, some dying from distinct diseases, and others unable to get well in such a vitiated atmosphere, she went and asked the Président de Harlay, the principal governor of the hospitals, to open the Hospital Saint Louis, in order to arrange the patients more comfortably. He approved of this idea, and intrusted her with the preparation of this additional house, which she at once undertook with the greatest care. A large number of the sick were transported there, and to all it proved a great relief.†

This hospital, composed of four large squares, in a good style of architecture, with several courts and a fine fountain, offered a general appearance of size and healthiness which this great mortality belied.

Built in 1606, in the reign of Henri IV., between the Faubourg du Temple and the Faubourg Saint Martin, and destined specially for infectious diseases, in memory of Saint Louis who died of the plague before Tunis, it had been almost always empty. But

* De Noaille's History of Madame de Maintenon.

† Choisy.

after Madame de Miramion had made it a sort of "*annexe*" to the Hôtel Dieu, the administrators of this hospital continued to send there their scorbutic patients: and in our days it is still particularly destined for chronic diseases, ring-worm, itch, and the like.

This terrible winter finally exhausted what was left of Madame de Miramion's large fortune. But in extraordinary emergencies she knew how to make extraordinary efforts; everything became poor in her house and on her person, and the suffering around her taught her day by day to retrench something new in her expenses.

"This is indeed the real advantage of relieving the wants of the poor, to learn to deny ourselves artificial wants created by luxury alone, and content ourselves with what is absolutely necessary."*

Her boundless charities and continual attention to the hospitals did not, however, prevent her from thinking of hidden misfortunes. She found time to steal away, to succour and console those who were ashamed to beg, and who, after having been well off, had fallen into distress without daring to own it; people who would often die without help in their miserable homes if Christian charity did not find out their wants in time to save them from despair and death.

She went, above all, to visit the families who lived in her own parish; and during all the time that the famine lasted, she had more than six thousand portions of soup made every other day, which were given

* Bossuet: "Funeral Oration of Anne de Gonzague."

to the most needy ; thus employing in the best way the large alms that the king gave her for the benefit of his people, at the same time that he was keeping up an army of five hundred thousand men to defend France against Europe.

As it required some hours to distribute this soup, religious and familiar instructions were given to the poor who were obliged to wait, in order that their souls might take away some nourishment, as well as their bodies. And what cannot be too much praised, is the heroic patience with which Madame de Miramion, who always assisted at these distributions, bore with the insolence of these unfortunate wretches. Misled by their misery, they dared to heap insults upon her who for the last forty years had sacrificed for them her fortune, her health, and her life.

"Courage, my sisters," she would say, on these occasions, to the nuns of her community; "the greater the annoyance you have to bear from men, the greater will be your merit before God; let them talk, and continue to serve them, your patience will appease them at last."

And, indeed, these same poor who were so insolent in the morning, came in the afternoon to ask pardon, with tears in their eyes. Such is the influence of gentleness, even over the coarsest natures.

IV.

IN the month of January of the following year (1695), the Président de Harlay, and the other governors of

the general hospital, not knowing how to re-imburse the hundred thousand crowns that the hospital had borrowed during the dearth of 1694, decided that it would be necessary to send away the greater number of the poor, and that they could only keep those whom age or infirmity had rendered incapable of working.

Madame de Miramion, to whom they came as usual to consult about this deplorable necessity, at first sighed over it with them, without being able to suggest a remedy; but on considering afterwards the fate of more than nine hundred young girls, who in one day would find themselves without a refuge, and left to their own devices, zeal for the salvation of souls possessed her, and she proposed various expedients, suggested by her generous heart to save them. None, unfortunately, were accepted. In despair, she then implored the governors to keep these poor girls till the month of April, hoping that in this interval Providence, which had never abandoned her, would again come to her aid, and that some means would be found for getting out of the difficulty.

That very night, as she was seeking some inspiration in prayer, and humbling herself before God, imploring Him to enlighten her in the midst of such distressing circumstances, it occurred to her that if they sent back all the girls who had some relations to their families, the others might perhaps be kept. She communicated this idea to Mademoiselle Pantaclin, the superioress of the hospital, who agreed with her, and they questioned all the patients one after the other. Two hundred only had families or

homes, and these were gradually sent back. But seven hundred remained. After a careful calculation, they considered that if the governors would only allow them lodgings in the empty dormitories of the establishment, they could, perhaps, earn enough for their food, provided three sous a day were added to their salary, which would require about forty thousand francs a year.

After having well weighed everything, and removed all the practical difficulties that might be brought forward, Madame de Miramion went to submit her plan to the governors. At the same time she offered to go and collect in the town the forty thousand francs which were necessary, and afterwards to give her attention, time, and care, to ensure the success of the undertaking. The administration, touched by so much generosity and devotedness, gratefully accepted her offer.

In spite of the weakness which was beginning to overpower her, in spite of the entreaties of her daughter, who feared for her health, Madame de Miramion at sixty-six years of age began again her office of beggar, so painful at any age! She again got into the coach she had kept against her will, (far more indeed, for the service of the poor than for her own ease,) and during more than a month, she was to be seen, from morning till night, going from door to door, humbly asking for alms.

The first person to whom she addressed herself was M. de Pontchartrain, then controller-general of the finances, M. de Miramion's cousin, and the former

guardian of her daughter.* She had kept up constant family and charitable relations both with him and his wife, a lady of great merit, and felt she could always reckon upon his support and advice.

"M. de Pontchartrain," says Saint-Simon, "was a little spare man, with a countenance sparkling with wit and animation, and who always gave more than he promised. It was rare to see such quickness of apprehension, such agreeable and lively conversation, and at the same time so much facility and certainty in business. Add to these qualities a great simplicity, and a bright gaiety which rose above everything, and made him charming both in business hours and at home. He was, in fact, full of pity, kindness, and justice." After having received Madame de Miramion with his usual kindness, M. de Pontchartrain advised her to go to the king, and promised that he would immediately execute the orders that his Majesty would not fail to give him. The following day she went to Versailles, and spoke on the subject to Madame de Maintenon, who was never hard to persuade when it was proposed to do something for the glory of God. She accordingly promised to speak to the king for her. Madame de Miramion, happy to have secured such a powerful auxiliary, was going away without asking her for anything, when Madame de Maintenon called her back, saying to her,

* Louis Phelippeaux, Comte de Pontchartrain, first cousin of M. de Miramion, by his mother, Anne de Beauharnais, secretary of State for the navy, and controller-general of finance i 1690.

"How comes it, madame, that you ask nothing from me?"

"Ah, madame," replied Madame de Miramion, "you give to so many charities that I should feel a scruple in proposing new ones to you."

But Madame de Maintenon gave her something for all that, not choosing that any good work should be done without her having some part in it.*

Three days afterwards, the controller-general, by the king's orders, sent her a bill for twenty-five thousand francs.

Monseigneur the Dauphin and the dowager princess of Conti (Mademoiselle de Blois, who wished to continue her mother-in-law's charities) sent her two hundred louis d'or.

Monsieur, the king's brother, whom she went to solicit, at the château of Saint Cloud, placed his offering in her hands himself. The Cardinal de Bouillon, high almoner of France, gave her a hundred louis d'or. M. de Boucherat, Chancellor of France, who had formerly asked her in marriage and who had continued to feel for her both esteem and admiration, sent her a considerable sum. The Duchesse de Guise, whose name, much respected at Court, was a household word with the poor, gave largely herself, and undertook to make several persons of the Court do the same, collecting their alms herself. And indeed there was no one at Versailles who wished or dared to refuse their contribution.

After the Court, the town followed the good

* Choisy, page 249.

example. Madame de Miramion went everywhere herself; all the magistrates of Paris, the financiers, the upper middle classes, merchants, and business-men of all kinds, received Madame de Miramion, and gave her their alms. She certainly had some annoyances to put up with in certain quarters, but she would willingly have suffered more for the love of Him for whom she was begging.

"It is necessary to love God very much," she said to the sister who accompanied her on this expedition, "to undertake such a work as this."

But her devotedness received its reward. She collected in this way more than fifty thousand francs, which, thanks to her care and economy, provided means of subsistence for these poor girls during two years. During this interval some of them were married, others were placed in situations, those who had learned a trade found means of gaining their livelihood, so that at last very few remained on the funds of the hospital.

So much zeal and so many services rendered to the poor greatly increased the reputation of Madame de Miramion. At the end of the year 1695, a community which had long been established at La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, like those of Amiens, sent to ask to be united to the Sisters of Sainte Géneviève. Madame de Miramion sent for all the nuns to Paris one after the other, instructed them herself, and then went to La Ferté, to give them the habit, and established them with all due solemnity.

This ceremony took place in the presence of the Bishop of Meaux, Monseigneur Bossuet, whose elo-

quence, writings, and enlightened zeal in the defence of the church had already made him celebrated. This prelate, wishing as Fléchier had done, in the funeral sermon of M. de Lamoignon, to render homage to the boundless charity and devotedness of Madame de Miramion, made a speech on the occasion of this new Foundation, and preached upon the subject with apostolic eloquence.

The more Madame de Miramion advanced in age the more she increased in merit. It seemed as if God, who was preparing to crown her with glory, wished to make her, so to speak, more worthy of the abundance of His Grace. Her heart, which had remained young, constantly inspired her with some fresh idea of good to be done, and her mind, always active, busied itself continually in new and charitable projects. The profound respect which she had always had for priests, made her wish to found a house of retreat for those ecclesiastics whom age or infirmities rendered incapable of performing service in the church. She considered that it was only just to soothe the old age of those who had worn out their strength in working in the Lord's vineyard.

Besides this, she wished to open a house for those priests whose affairs called them to Paris, so that they might all be lodged together, and not be mixed up with people of a different kind. And lastly, saddened at the sight of certain members of the clergy, who, forgetting the sanctity of their character, gave themselves up to vice and immorality, she proposed to add to these establishments a third house in which those who could not be reformed by admonitions

should be shut up in order that this punishment might deter others.

These plans were noble, and worthy of her charity; unfortunately, death did not leave her the time to accomplish them.

CHAPTER XV.

LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH OF MADAME DE MIRAMION.

1696.

"Die like the grain of wheat, to live again in Thee, O, my God!"—*Madame de Miramion.*

I.

"AND now," exclaims Bossuet, "what remains but to show how she made use of life to arrive at a blessed death?"

Her life, as we have seen, may be summed up in two things—in acts of faith towards God, and of charity towards her neighbour.

The Jubilee of 1696 was her last manifestation of faith: the care she bestowed on Madame de Guise her last act of charity; and her death, noble and calm like her life, summed up an existence which Divine love had made truly sublime.

On the 1st of March, 1696, the Cardinal de Noailles, Archbishop of Paris, (who had just succeeded to Mgr. de Harlay, who had died suddenly at Conflans),* having announced a Jubilee, Madame de Miramion took ad-

* Of a fit of apoplexy, on the 5th of August, 1695.

vantage of it to give a retreat for the poor, she herself following all the exercises with the most exemplary fervour.

The love of God, which she had chosen as the subject of her meditation during this retreat, had so taken possession of her soul that she appeared hardly to be still on earth, and at the end of the exercises she confessed to her director that at no period of her life had she felt so much hope of obtaining the indulgences of the Jubilee.*

A person to whom she spoke of it in confidence, having asked her a few months before her death what took place during this retreat, she owned to him "that God seemed to come so near her, and held her so tightly bound and attached to Him, that she thought she was going to die." These are her own words, as if she meant to say that in these transports which it is not permitted to every one to experience, or even to understand, it seemed to her that she existed less in herself than in God, and that, being more attached to Him than to herself, she felt quite ready to leave this earth to be inseparably united to Him.†

During the second fortnight of the Jubilee, she gave another retreat for ladies in the world, which was also very well attended, and to which she also devoted

* A quarter of a century before, the 23rd of March, 1671, the opening of a Jubilee took place at Nôtre-Dame. On the 28th the king went to communion publicly at the Récollets, and touched 1200 persons for the king's evil, having the dauphin and Bossuet by his side.

† Choisy.

her whole attention. It was not yet over, however, when Madame de Miramion was obliged to leave home suddenly to go to Versailles, where the Duchesse de Guise,* who was dying, earnestly entreated her presence.

Dangeau, in his newspaper, says, on Wednesday the 14th March, 1696: "Madame de Guise is seriously ill of an illness similar to that of which M. de Luxembourg died last year. Her physicians have a very bad opinion of her case." And the following day, the 15th, he adds: "On leaving the Council, the king went to see Madame de Guise, who is getting much worse."

This princess, who was the daughter of Gaston d'Orléans, was cousin of the king and younger sister of the great Mademoiselle, and was only fifty years of age. She was the widow of Louis de Lorraine, Duc de Guise, celebrated for his duels, his romantic love affairs, and the unsuccessful audacity of his attempt upon Naples.

She generally inhabited the little Luxembourg Palace, where she had her ladies of honour, and received the ambassadors officially; but as she had always been greatly attached to the king, she was often at Versailles.

Madame de Guise, whose whole life had been occupied with good works, was, however, in great fear of death, and although she was already dangerously ill,

* Elisabeth d'Orléans, third daughter of Gaston and of Marguerite de Lorraine, born in 1646, a widow in 1671 of Louis-Joseph de Lorraine, Duc de Guise, died at Versailles, the 17th of March, 1696.

no one about her dared to tell her of her danger.* Madame de Miramion, who had a peculiar talent for assisting the dying, and consoling the unhappy, by instilling gradually into their hearts true Christian feelings, at once spoke to her of death with a pious freedom, made her receive the last sacraments, and remained with her till her last breath.

The fear of death, which had troubled the princess all her life, was dispelled as soon as Madame de Miramion came near her, and was never again allowed to torment her.

> "Grâce à ses soins pieux, sans terreur, sans remords,
> L'Agonie en ses bras plus doucement s'achève."†

And is it not indeed a special favour from God, and a guarantee of a good and holy death, to expire thus absolved and blessed, with words of faith and hope upon one's lips, in the arms of a holy woman, who receives one's last sigh, and offers to God lovingly and prayerfully the soul which is about to leave this earth?

On Saturday, the 17th of March, the king, on coming out from mass, went to see Madame de Guise, who was dying. She was much affected at seeing the king, to whom she had always been greatly attached, and said to him, "If God rests my soul, as I hope He will, I shall pray for your Majesty and for peace." Two hours afterwards she died, having preserved consciousness and speech to the last moment. She had received extreme unction that morning, and died with the tranquillity of a person who has led an innocent

* Choisy. † "La Pitié," by Delille.

life. The king had left her room in tears, and spoke of her several times during the day, always in terms of the highest praise.* As the worthy grand-daughter of Henry the Fourth she might have received a princely burial in the vaults of the kings, her ancestors; but according to her own wish she was buried without any ceremony at the Carmelites at Paris, on Tuesday the 20th of March, 1696.

II.

Madame de Miramion came back to Paris on Sunday the 18th exceedingly tired. She had sat up for several nights, and been compelled to speak a great deal. Her age and her health could no longer stand such great fatigue. But as her own sufferings always appeared light to her when it was a question of relieving those of others, she had never thought of herself at all. As she had often asked in prayer, she had been devoted to her friends even unto death, according to the example of our Divine Redeemer. But her own hour was come; the following morning, the 19th of March, 1696, she was found in her bed, her countenance livid, with an intermittent pulse, and great nausea. She had suffered all night, but without choosing to wake or disturb any one.

Her daughter, as soon as she came into her room, saw at once that she had exhausted her little remaining strength, and that her end was near. They ran for the doctors, who, taking her illness for an attack of apoplexy, gave her in two doses eighteen grains of

* Dangeau.

emetic. Her pulse came back, but her pains increased, which she offered humbly to Jesus Christ.

Calm and resigned in the midst of the uneasiness of those around her, she saw death approaching without asking for a respite, never having had any other wish than to accomplish our Lord's will. The pain she suffered never drew from her lips or heart—I do not say a bitter complaint or a word of murmuring—but a single movement of impatience, or any expression of uneasiness. It seemed that it had been for her that the Psalmist had said: "I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest, for Thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety."

M. Pollet, curate of Saint Nicolas, the confessor of the community and hers also, hastened to her bedside. "I am so afraid of being impatient, I am suffering so much," she said to him. And as he replied to her that God would thus perhaps spare her the pains of purgatory, "Ah! God will be very merciful, if He will be contented with this," she murmured, fearing not to suffer enough.

They did not dare bring her Holy Communion on account of her continual sickness. She saw the embarrassment of her confessor by the silence he observed on this subject, and said to him,—

"Ah! Father, I have so often received our Lord during the course of my life, perhaps unworthily, that I deserve not to have the consolation of receiving Him when dying."

She was asked if she wished to receive extreme unction. She immediately replied that, not being able to take the holy viaticum, she esteemed herself

very fortunate that God granted her the favour of receiving the sacrament for the dying; and, having made her last confession, she received it with as much attention and fervour as if she were not suffering at all.

Some hours afterwards, her sickness having ceased, she was informed that the Blessed Sacrament was going to be brought to her.

This dying woman, ever strong in God, then forgot her sufferings, which were every moment increasing, only thinking of her happiness in being united to her Divine Master, and gathering up all her remaining strength of mind and body went bravely forth to meet her God.

Half sitting up in bed, motionless from attention and respect, her hands clasped together, her eyes sometimes raised to Heaven, sometimes fixed on the Holy Host, her countenance beaming with the most ardent love, full of faith, humility, and contrition; perfectly quiet, and replying to everything by the most fervent acts, she received the adorable Body of Jesus Christ with a devotion which edified everyone, wishing but to die in her Saviour's embrace.

The Présidente de Nesmond implored her to ask God to restore her to health. "My child," she replied with a cheerful countenance, "I must go now and possess Him. I have grievously offended Him, but I hope in His mercy." As she suffered exceedingly, and often kissed a crucifix, which she held in her hand, her daughter said to her, "Our Lord fastens you, indeed, to His cross." "Too happy," she replied, "for the share He gives me in it. I give you this

dear crucifix, my child; I have had it for thirty years."

It would be difficult to describe all the marks of tenderness she bestowed on her daughter, whom she had always loved so tenderly, and of whom, as she herself said, she had never had the smallest reason to complain. Her brothers, M. de Rubelle and M. de Purnon, found her at this moment as she had ever been, full of really maternal love for them. Piety had not extinguished natural affection in her; and her heart, in giving itself entirely to God, had not withdrawn from her family the share which belonged to it.*

Towards evening she desired that the little box containing the papers relating to her confessions should be brought to her, and though she could hardly sit up in bed, she wanted to make a packet of them and burn them at a candle she had just had lighted; but her daughter, having perceived her intention, begged she would not take this trouble, and put it off to another time. She obeyed, and Providence having permitted that during the rest of her illness she thought no more about it, these papers were thus preserved.†

Her ordinary doctor having failed in relieving her, they sent for M. Helvétius, who, after having examined her, said, four days before her death, that she could never get well, and refused to prescribe for her. M.

* Choisy.

† These are the papers which have been added to the Appendix, under the general title of Madame de Miramion's writings.

Caretti then tried a prescription of his own, which was equally useless. They gave her cordials, and English drops ; they bled her twice, and tried to make her perspire, and at last gave her quinine. But as she suffered much from a stitch in the side, and spit blood, she took this last medicine with a smile, saying, "The day before yesterday an emetic, yesterday bleeding, to-day quinine. Poor people !—they do what they can !"

The care she had taken of the sick throughout her life had given her great experience in illness and in the use of different remedies. But she gave herself up without resistance to the advice of her physicians, even when they gave her remedies contrary to her opinion, and that from simple Christian obedience. Her sufferings went on increasing, and though she could scarcely bear them, she still accepted them with a strength of will and courage which was as admirable as it was edifying. She never once prayed that they might cease ; only, from time to time, she confessed that she suffered beyond all expression, and fearing to lose patience she implored all those who came to see her to pray to God for her, in order to obtain the strength to suffer patiently.

As she knew that this strength is derived mainly from the Bread of Life, which is called on that account the "nourishment of the strong," she manifested an earnest desire to receive It once more. But the rules of the Church did not at that time permit the reiteration of the holy viaticum in the space of a few days. Her daughter asked for a special authorisation from Mgr. de Noailles, Archbishop of Paris, who had great pleasure in dispensing Madame de Miramion

from the usual rules. She received our Saviour for the second time with such obvious consolation and fervour, that she remained, as it were, transported with a Christian joy, of which the effect remained until her last breath.

The nuns of her community, who were kneeling round her bed, then implored her to give them her blessing. "I am not worthy to give it to them," she murmured to her confessor, endeavouring to struggle against her weakness; "but God will bless them, if they remain faithful to their vocation." They then went and kissed her, one after the other, and she gave them the advice best suited to the character of each. She had scarcely finished speaking to them, when a sister from a community in Paris, of which she was very fond, came in and said loudly, without any precaution, "Madame, our community is very desirous to have your heart after your death." She smiled at this proposal, and replied, pointing to the sisters of the community, "My heart belongs to my daughters."

The Archbishop of Paris came to see her two days running, and gave her his blessing, after having assured her that he would always take care of her community. Her confessor, M. Jolly, who was himself very ill, also wished to see her, and had himself carried twice to her bedside.

As, in spite of her sufferings, her mind retained all its clearness, she requested that they would proceed to the election of another Superioress before her death, in order that she might die as a simple sister of Sainte Geneviève; but the Abbé Pollet, having told

her that this was impossible, she said nothing more on the subject.

Then, forgetting herself entirely, only to think of the welfare of others, she strove to write and beg of Madame de Maintenon, for the last time, to obtain from the king a continuance of his liberality for some of the charities she had founded. But her strength failed her; she could not form the letters, and she was obliged to dictate to her daughter a few words, which she desired her to carry herself to Madame de Maintenon directly after her death. "What! Madame, do you think of anything at this moment besides God?" said her confessor, who no doubt feared the fatigue for her. "Yes, Father," she replied, "when it is for God." Then, with admirable presence of mind and composure, and that keen practical common sense which never deserted her, she dictated as follows:—

"MADAME,—I have desired my daughter to go to you after my death to thank you for all the kindness you have shown me during my life, and to assure you, Madame, that I die full of gratitude and esteem for all the graces and virtues which God has bestowed on you, and to assure you that if He should mercifully receive me, as I trust in His goodness He will, I will beseech Him to give you perseverance and increase in piety and in all goodness.

"Permit me, Madame, to ask you a last favour, which is to obtain from the king a continuance of the alms which he has given me to distribute since the death of Mademoiselle de Lamoignon to aid in keep-

ing up the dispensary for the poor whom our nuns take care of, and which relieves a hundred and sometimes two hundred a day. That charity does so much good! I plead, also, for the house of retreat, which has turned out a very useful work; and also to keep up the work-room in the parish of Saint Nicolas. Eighteen hundred or two thousand pounds annually would suffice to support all these good works, but without it they cannot be maintained, our community not being in a position to do it, in spite of its good-will.

"I ask, then, this grace from the king through your mediation, Madame, but I only ask it for some years, because there are persons who have promised to endow these institutions after their death. If this assistance should fail, a great deal of the cost that I have been at to establish these things will be lost, and the poor will suffer. But I trust in God and in the king's goodness; I feel that his charity will draw down upon him great blessings from heaven. I will ask them immediately from our Lord for his majesty, if I am fortunate enough to go to Him for eternity. I hope he will also continue to give his usual alms of two thousand pounds for the sick poor of the new town. This sum is absolutely necessary. I hope, Madame, that you will not yourself abandon all these good works, and that you will kindly continue your protection to our sisters. I die in the same sentiments that I have lived, and am, Madame, your very humble and obedient servant,

"MARIE BONNEAU DE MIRAMION.

"Allow me to implore of you not to forget the Clerical

Purse. This charity requires your protection; and the poor sisters of Providence who do a great deal of good, likewise need that the king should continue to them his annual alms of twelve hundred pounds."*

After having finished this letter she conversed for a long time with her confessor on her sins and her want of correspondence with God's grace; but when the latter let fall some words upon the confidence which her past life might give her in the divine mercy, she interrupted him by saying, "Ah, Father, is it thus you speak to a sinful woman?" She herself held the blessed taper while making her profession of faith and renewing her baptismal vows. At one moment when it was thought she was going to expire, her confessor having said to her, "Madame, you have no longer a pulse, but you have a heart: what must you do with it?" she roused herself all of a sudden and replied firmly, "I must love God." Some time afterwards he added, "Madame, you are going to die; in what disposition do you wish God to find you?" She immediately replied, "In the exercise of His holy love." She remained two days longer hovering between life and death. But one evening M. Pollet having said to her, "Madame, are you thinking of God?" "I am thinking of Him always," she replied, "for I love Him." That night her daughter, her niece (Madame de la Hoguette), her brothers (M. de Rubelle and M. de Purnon), and her community, were all round her bed; they saw that her last hour was

* History of Madame de Maintenon, by the Duc de Noailles, 1849, volume ii., chapter iii., p. 175.

come. This sight affected them deeply, yet no one wept. Each felt the overwhelming loss they were about to sustain; but it was impossible to murmur at seeing her about to receive her promised reward, for her death was worthy of her life. While they were reciting the prayers for the agonizing, Madame de la Hoguette heard her whisper, "My God, I accept death and the destruction of my body; may it be reduced to dust, may it become food for worms; but thou, O my soul, go forth and be united to thy God!"

M. Caretti* wished to try fresh remedies, and had some more blisters applied. She submitted to all they wished. "It will not do me any good," she simply said to her daughter: "it is time for me to go to God."

"Madame, have you nothing which gives you pain?" asked her confessor. "Yes, Father," she replied, "to have been so unfaithful to God; but I have confidence in Him, for He is my Saviour."

At last the moment of separation came; the Présidente de Nesmond knelt down beside her bed, and asked for her blessing. "My dear daughter," she said to her, "do not weep; thank God for the graces He has given you; love Him and serve Him with all your heart; there is nothing else worth living for; one is very glad, when death arrives, to have been alto-

* Caretti was a quack doctor. Madame de Sévigné, speaking of him in one of her letters, says, "Ah, what a fool!" and Labruyère has sketched his portrait under the name of Carocanni in an eloquent disquisition against the quacks who deceive the sick.

gether His. If He grants me mercy, oh how I shall pray for you!"

The Abbé de Brisacier and the Abbé Tiberge, who had hardly left her during the last days of her illness, were at the head of her bed; but they did not think her so near her end, because she still preserved the use of all her senses; when she said to one of them, "Ah, Father! how much I suffer!" "Yes, your sufferings are great," he replied, "but the happiness which God prepares in heaven for patient and faithful souls is infinitely greater; you will know it some day." "I know it already," she replied with a faith and a firmness which surprised him. They were her last words; for the Abbé having added, "Say, Madame, that you *believe* it already; you will *know* it in glory," she acquiesced by a movement of her head, and expired a few instants afterwards without any struggle or convulsions. Her eyelids closed of themselves, her mouth remained shut, and in the midst of the pallour of death an expression of such sweetness and beauty pervaded her countenance that it seemed to the mourners around her an assurance of her eternal happiness.

She expired on Saturday, the 24th of March, 1696, at half-past twelve o'clock. As soon as she was dead the people insisted on seeing her, and forced the doors of the community. For several days it had been impossible to pass before her house, so great had been the number of carriages and the multitude of persons of all classes whose very life seemed to hang upon hers. During fifty years she had consecrated herself entirely to the relief of the distressed and suffering,

and therefore the poor wept for her as for a mother, and the affliction of her family and her community became really a public sorrow. The tears of the poor were in fact her best panegyric.

During two days it was necessary to have her body exposed to the public upon the bed where she appeared to have fallen asleep in the Lord in perfect peace. In her death she still resembled the virtuous woman described by Solomon: "dying with a calm and cheerful countenance, worthy to be received up into heaven, where she will appear, together with her good works, and loaded with the treasures of grace which she had heaped together."* They buried her (according to her last instructions) as a simple sister of Sainte Géneviève, without costly preparations or an expensive ceremony. Six poor men carried her body to the church; all the clergy of Saint Nicolas du Chardonet and a great number of those of other parishes accompanied it. The thirty sisters of her community, each with a taper in her hand, came afterwards, with the eighty girls of her work-room, and the three hundred children who were taught in her house. The superioress of the general hospital came after, followed by a great number of young girls, to whom two years before she had saved more than life, and whose tears expressed their gratitude.

Her two brothers, all the members of her family, and a great number of friends followed as mourners. In every street by which the funeral procession passed there was an immense crowd, who seemed to have lost all in losing her. But in the church† there were

* Choisy. † Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, her parish church.

no hangings and very few candles. The poverty and simplicity she had so loved during life accompanied her in death. Her body was buried in the cemetery of Saint Nicolas, in a corner adjoining the chapel of Sainte Geneviève, and her heart was deposited in the interior of this chapel, under two commemorative tablets of white marble, one placed on the pavement and the other against the wall.*

III.

THUS died Madame de Miramion at the age of sixty-six years.

And now that her soul has rejoined its Creator, and that the earth has received all of her that was mortal, let us recal for the last time the qualities and the good works which have enshrined her in our memory, and will engrave her name for ever in the annals of the poor.

Great nobility of heart, a natural elevation of ideas; an ardent love for all that was right, good, and great; an exquisite mixture of sensitiveness and yet of sound judgment; of reflection and yet of enthusiasm; in a word, something which it was impossible to describe of gentle kindness, and of soft melancholy, a nature which could be austere and yet tender, and which won the love, the sympathy and the veneration

* Description of Paris, by Piganiol de la Force. It is there that the remains of Madame de Miramion reposed until the suppression of religious houses on the 6th of September, 1790. Since that period her community, which was dispersed, has never been re-established.

of all; these are the leading characteristics of the life we have been attempting to describe.

Orphans gathered once more into a real home; erring girls brought back into the right way; penitent souls rescued from despair; the sick and plague-stricken saved from neglect and carefully tended; hospitals, which had been closed, re-opened; the word of God carried to India, and heathen souls brought to the knowledge of a Saviour; childhood trained in the paths of industry and goodness; old age assisted and consoled; all moral and physical sufferings alleviated by her charity, or soothed by her sympathy; these are some of the works which will immortalize her name in the hearts of all who love our Lord.

All the authors of the seventeenth century who have mentioned the name of Madame de Miramion are unanimous in their praise of her.

Dangeau, in his newspaper, says, on the 24th of March, 1696:

"Madame de Miramion is dead; she is an irreparable loss to the poor, to whom she devoted her whole life. The king had the highest respect for her, aided her in her good works, and never refused her anything."

Madame de Sévigné, who was to die herself a short time afterwards, said, in the last letter she wrote to M. de Coulanges: "I have visited the holy and modest burying place of Madame de Guise, whose humble refusal to lie with the kings her ancestors, merits an eternal crown; . . . and as to Madame de Mira-

mion, that mother of the poor and of the Church, hers is indeed a public loss!" *

Again, the Duc de Saint-Simon in his Memoirs, despite his usual satirical vein, says, "We have to record at the same time the death of Madame de Miramion at the age of sixty-six, in the month of March; and it really was a loss. Her maiden name was Bonneau . . . ." And after having recapitulated her wonderful life and innumerable good works, he adds, "The king always had the greatest consideration for her, which her humility made her use with much prudence, and always for the good of others; she showed a like discretion and wisdom in dealing with the ministers, her ecclesiastical superiors, and the public magistrates, and may be termed the mother and guardian of the poor."

Such was the life of Madame de Miramion.

She passed through the world like the symbolical virgin of Byzantium, with her two arms open to all mankind, while she raised herself to God by faith and good works. Worthy from her piety to bear the title of "Mother of the Church," which her contemporaries gave her, she equally deserved by the abundance of her charities that happy expression of "The Great Almoner" of the seventeenth century, by which she has been characterised by one of the most distinguished writers of our time, M. le Duc de Noailles, in his life of Madame de Maintenon.

Such was the life of this really noble woman, in which neither a day nor a moment was wasted. Even

* Letter of the 29th of March, 1696.

at the last, suffering, motionless, dying, it was she who, by her patience, her resignation, and the calm of her countenance, together with her tender foresight for others, still set a good example to those around her, and left to us all a pattern of the death of the just.

If her loss was a lasting grief to her family and to the poor, the remembrance of her life may inspire others to follow in her steps, and teach us all that no circumstances of birth or position can exempt us from the practice of personal charity and the employment of all our talents for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

APPENDIX.

MADAME DE MIRAMION'S WRITINGS.

1674—1696.

(Colligite fragmenta, ne pereant!)

I.

THE ACCOUNT GIVEN BY MADAME DE MIRAMION TO HER DIRECTOR, M. FERRET, OF THE GRACES GRANTED TO HER BY GOD DURING HER DEVOTIONS.

SOME days before the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene, in 1674, the person whom you know, being in prayer in a wood, and considering the advantage she had of being for a little while in solitude, felt a great desire to love God and to be occupied with Him alone; He favoured her, it appeared to her, with the grace of entire union with and abandonment to Him, and some time afterwards He showed her that exterior retreats are sometimes good and necessary; but that she must always lead an interior life, in all the occupations that Providence should assign to her, uniting herself continually with Him; that she could do this if she pleased; that if she were faithful she would always be in His presence, doing all for Him, without fear or precipitation.

On the eve of the feast, at night in her prayers, her heart was

greatly raised to God by the thought that He was Almighty and Omnipotent; she rejoiced at this with Him; a great confidence filled her heart, and then love, or at least the desire of love, and the certainty that He would give her the grace to love Him perfectly, to live and die in the love and for the love of Him alone. God showed her that to attain to this she must be exceedingly recollected, and united with Him; gentle, charitable, humble, and detached from creatures and all human consolations.

She kept always repeating, "Take away, Lord, whatever displeases Thee in me, and put in me whatever Thou seest most in accordance with Thy good pleasure." Having gone to bed again after her prayers, which she always said upon her knees, she continued so transported with the grace of God, that she could not go to sleep.

She said her *credo* with great faith, and was much affected by it. This continued almost until the time of morning prayers, when she went to mass and communion. During all this time, and even during her thanksgiving, she was absorbed in these thoughts; it seemed to her that it was not she who was thus occupied, but God in her, who instructed her in all her duties, and the way in which she ought to practise them, beginning by a continual remembrance of His holy presence. It appeared to her that He told her in the depth of her heart, that in working for Him she would be most united to Him; that she must do things one after the other without being over-eager; that she was too much so; that she ought to remember He was always in the midst of her heart; that she must be gentle, charitable, cordial and obliging towards the sisters, bearing with their defects, and acting towards them as Jesus Christ had done with His apostles, reproving them gently, and forgiving them easily. With regard to persons in the world, she was told to be courteous, civil, and friendly; entering into their smallest interests and feelings with patience and charity, and speaking to them gently according to their measure. She was to excel, in fact, in this virtue of charity.

God showed her that she must be mortified, and as she wished to know in what, she was told in the depths of her heart, so that she might do faithfully what she was permitted to do. God inspired her with the idea also that He wished her to be entirely detached not only from all which was not Himself,

(as daughter, brothers, sisters, friends, fortune, honour, and pleasure,) but also from spiritual things, from all taste for prayer, from sensible devotion, and even from inclination for Holy Communion, to bear even the apparent abandonment of grace, and of the help of God, if it be His Holy Will.

The following day, being again at prayer in the wood, and full of all these thoughts, and above all, of faith, hope, and charity, God, it seemed to her, brought back to her mind the feelings He had given her three or four years before, and told her that it was necessary she should live and die in the love, and for the love of God.

II.

MADAME DE MIRAMION'S RESOLUTIONS FOR HER SALVATION.

1674.

GOD is so great that he fills everything, and I am so puny and miserable; I cannot do for a moment without His presence, and I am always in need of Him.

The greatest of all evils is to be deprived of God, and the greatest good is to be united with Him, and to this I can only attain in the world through that faith which worketh by love.

Resolve, by the grace of God, to think very often of His presence, to recollect that He is in me, and I in Him, and in everything to believe in Him, adore Him, love Him, and annihilate myself in Him. God acts continually in me and for His glory; I ought to act with the same intention, and for His glory alone, and have no will but His, so that all my words, actions, and thoughts, should be conformed to His.

Beg of Him to take from me all which may displease Him, and to create in me all which is pleasing to Him; beseeching Him to deal with me without caring for my sensible satisfaction; it does not matter if I am pleased provided that God is.

I have formed a great wish to be united to God, not only in fact, but by detachment from all creatures; I have prayed to God to draw me closer towards Himself, to swallow me up and consume my will in His own, in order that I may be one with

Him. I hope to have such a great esteem for everything which is of God that I may despise all which is not of Him, and in nowise attach myself to it, saying, "That is not my God;" for that which is not God and does not lead us to Him, ought to be as nothing in our eyes; may I sacrifice daily to His love, all that is dearest to me, without reserve.

I must try and keep myself more quiet, and be less carried away in my words or actions; when I speak to our sisters in private or together, I will ask for God's grace, and beseech Him to speak to them by my mouth, and wait patiently for everything from Him alone.

When I am in any pious meeting I will only say what I think when I am asked to do so; and before speaking I will try to recollect myself, and ask God to enlighten me, so that I may say nothing but that with which He inspires me; if I am asked for advice in private, I will do the same thing; if it be an important affair I will always ask for time to pray to God, and to reflect upon it in His presence, always taking the gospel for my rule.

I will endeavour not to be too eager in my wishes, nor in the performance of the good works that may be intrusted to me. I will never undertake any important ones of myself, but only by obedience; and then do them quietly and patiently, without desiring to finish them promptly through impatience.

I will esteem the life of the soul a thousand times more than the outward life, and will endeavour to act in such a manner that all my exterior actions should become interior ones, by the purity of my intentions, doing them simply for God alone, taking no other share in them than the trouble and the humiliation, if there be any, which they may bring upon me. I will endeavour to possess my soul in peace that it may enjoy God.

I will never lose my regular time for devotion for a slight cause, and, if I am compelled to lose it, I will endeavour in the twenty-four hours to regain at least a portion of it.

I will do all that depends on me while I pray, not wilfully to be filled with distractions and useless thoughts; because they take the place that God alone ought to fill in my heart. I will cut them short by the help of His grace, by a spirit of love, and a stronger desire of being united to Him. I will strive to forgive, love, bear with, and do good to my neighbour, serve

him with gentleness and charity, for the love of God, without showing either repugnance or annoyance, and with the sole intention of honouring God in him.

God is truth; I will endeavour to honour Him by great simplicity and truthfulness, above all, by never saying anything against these two virtues.

As the greater part of my faults are caused by an over-weening pride, I will labour, with the help of God's grace, to destroy it, in order to honour Him by acts of humility, annihilation and dying to myself, and accept, in this intention, the contempt that people may have for me.

III.

MADAME DE MIRAMION'S QUESTIONS TO HER DIRECTOR, M. FERRET, AND HIS REPLIES.

1676.

As you are the person in the world for whom God has given me the greatest confidence and esteem, I beg you to tell me, in case God wills that I should have to make the sacrifice of your life before my own, what you think most conducive to His glory in what I am going to propose to you.

Question 1.—"Whom should Ipropose to our sisters as superior of our community?"

Reply.—"Messrs. Jolly, Benjamin, Chamillart, Coursier, Bézard, Dumai, Tronçon et Chesnard."

Question 2.—"Must I not make known to our sisters the deficiencies of those that they might propose to me, in case I should know of any?"

Reply.—"You must tell the good and evil that you know to the counsellors of the community."

Question 3.—"When the Superior is elected, must I not tell him the best and worst of the community?"

Reply.—"You must tell the Superior what you may know of your community, without betraying secrets."

Question 4.—"Shall I not be obliged to obey him in everything which respects the community, as also for my own private affairs?"

Reply.—"Certainly."

Question 5.—"Should I not do well to get rid of several little employments and exterior occupations which occasion me a great deal of distraction through my want of recollection, and also because I shall have no one to assist and advise me as you are kind enough to do; otherwise I fear I shall not have a quiet mind, and should commit many faults?"

Reply.—"You must not wish to give up the care of outward things, otherwise you will go against the grace of God. But if your Superior forbids any particular thing, you will obey him with simplicity."

Question 6.—"Can I not conscientiously ask to be discharged from the employment of Superioress, if I see others better fitted to hold this position than myself?"

Reply.—"That will not be yet awhile."

Question 7.—"Must I never think of becoming a nun?"

Reply.—"Get the idea of being a nun quite out of your head. God does not choose you should be one except in the way you are now."

Question 8.—"I beg of you to decide if I ought to take a Director, or if you think I can do without; in which case I must ask you what I ought to do, and how I ought to act?"

Reply.—"It is good and necessary for you to have some one to guide you."

Question 9.—"If you think it necessary that I should take a Director, ought I to take the Superior that the community will elect, abandoning myself to God's providence, or should I choose one? In this case, I beseech you to choose him yourself, as I have more confidence in you than in myself."

Reply.—"It is more perfect that you should take him whom Providence sends you. I do not oblige you to do it, and you can choose another if that one does not suit you, that is to say, if you do not feel you can open your heart to him. I cannot mention any particular person to you; pray much to God; Mother Agnes of the Carmelites can aid you greatly; trust to her judgment entirely, both for yourself and for your community."

Question 10.—"How shall I arrange these two authorities of Superior and Director?"

Reply.—"If you choose for Director another than the Supe-

rior, you must obey the one in exterior things, and the other in all matters regarding your soul; and you will beg the Director whom you have chosen to consider the wishes and orders of your Superior."

Question 11.—"In case I take a Director, shall I make a vow of obedience to him? You know the reasons for and against."

Reply.—"Do not make a vow of obedience to him; it might be embarrassing on account of your Superior."

Question 12.—"Ought I to tell everything to my new Director relative to my past life?—of all the graces that God has given me? Ought I to make a general confession to him? I could not make up my mind, for many reasons, to tell him the graces that God has given me without having first made my confession. I confess that in consequence of my great pride it would cost me much to make a general confession; but, if it is necessary, I trust that God will give me the grace to overcome my *amour-propre.* You know what is my greatest difficulty, and what caused me the most pain in making it to yourself, and that if God had not urged me on I should not have made it. You know what were my reasons; I beg you will decide what I ought to do. First tell me if I can conscientiously openly confess my past life; and, secondly, if you advise my doing so."

Reply.—"It is necessary that you should tell him who is to direct you the graces that God has given you, but you must not make a general confession. I do not at all advise you to do it; be satisfied with those you have already made. As far as I can, I forbid you to do it, unless he who directs you commands your doing so, which I do not believe he will. Make a review of a few years, and one every year."

Question 13.—"Must I always go to confession at the Parish Church, although he who directs me should not belong to it? I confess that I do not like it at all, but that does not matter."

Reply.—"You ought to set the example of going to confession at your Parish Church, and you will do well to go to the confessor of the community; it will be more perfect to be dependent on the leadings of Providence, and those of your Superior. For your extraordinary confessions, you must go to him who directs you."

IV.

PIOUS MEDITATIONS OF MADAME DE MIRAMION DURING HER SPIRITUAL RETREAT: FIRST RETREAT UNDER THE DIRECTION OF M. FERRET.

FIRST DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

THERE is nothing that does not tend to its end. Now, the end of man is God. I have seen that all created things come to an end; man alone runs counter to this belief, and acts as if the world and himself were the one object of life; I see that all that God has given me I have employed against my real interest at the last.

Resolution.

To renounce the devil, the world, and myself, and above all to resist temptation, and to say, "All this is not my end, and ought not to be my occupation, or the subject of my conversation;" I will, by the grace of God, employ all the faculties of my soul to glorify God as the one object of my existence; and I will remember that this life is only a passage to go to Him.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On the good we ought to do each day.

I feel that if God asked me for only one good action in my life, I could not show Him one, so defective is all that I have done; and yet I have always been convinced that He required much from me, on account of my being a widow, and I remember what Saint Paul says. I have begged Him to take care of me, and declared I would think of nothing but Him; yet I am always led away by human motives; I feel quite confused at the sight of the imperfection of all my actions—even of those which appear the best.

Resolution.

In all things, great or small, do them with singleness of heart.

THIRD MEDITATION.

That everything is vanity, except to love and serve God.

I have felt the truth of these words, considering that at the

hour of death all worldly things will appear to me as a dream. I felt a deep regret for having been so attached to them ; I assured God that I desired to withdraw my affections from them at once ; especially my over-attachment to my daughter and other things. I acknowledged that God had given me all these things to conduct me to Himself, and that I have hindered it by attaching myself to things which were not my real end, but the way and the means to go to it.

Resolution.

To separate my affections from all things which do not lead to God, and to care for them only as much as He who is my end allows and commands it.

SECOND DAY.

First Meditation.

Of natural inclinations.

I occupied myself to-day with the thought that grace leads us to consider our latter end, and that our natural feelings turn us away from it, and that if we do not conquer them they will be our ruin.

I see that I have not a greater enemy than myself, and that my inclinations side with the devil and the world to destroy me ; that I open the door to them, and give them arms against me, although they all seek my perdition. I made many acts of confidence in God, that He would protect me and avenge me of my enemies. I promised that I would make neither peace nor truce with them, and above all, with my natural inclinations, which tend to self-love, pride, vanity, dejection, impatience, uneven temper, fastidiousness, a dread of suffering, and a love of complaining ; eagerness and hastiness accompany all my actions, words, and thoughts ; I have promised to try and give all this up, and I have asked our Lord for grace to struggle against it ; I think too much of the world's opinion, which leads me to do wrong, and prevents my doing right, asking "What will people say?" I hope to have strength to give up all these considerations.

Second Meditation.

Death.

I considered that at the hour of my death I should wish to

have practised all sorts of virtues, and to have been disengaged from all my evil inclinations, and have done in this world all that the saints did. God gave me the thought, that were I to live a thousand years it would not suffice to do what He desires, which is a perfect renunciation of all my bad inclinations, and the acquirement of every virtue. I offered myself to Him to begin at once, and persevere unto my life's end. I thought of the mercy of God, Who has preserved my life, and Who has taken from me the punishment that I have deserved, and waited patiently till grace should bring me back to Him to do penance, to renounce my own will, and to do what is right. I remained stedfast in the trust that I should not see death, until grace had brought me to a closer union with Him, as otherwise there is no salvation for me; God sent me to my Director to help me to find out my natural weaknesses and inclinations, and to help me to destroy them.

THIRD MEDITATION.

Of Judgment.

I considered what is the judgment which those must expect who live according to their tastes and inclinations.

I saw that He who is my Judge is the same who has forbidden us to live thus, and who died to make all our inclinations die likewise in us: He will examine to what they have led us—to good, to bad, or to indifferent actions; He will open our eyes, and self-love will no longer be there to hide our faults from us; the devil will no longer deceive us, and we shall see ourselves as we really are. He is a Judge who will not allow Himself to be prevailed upon; *we must be judged.* All the good that we fancy we have done will be there, and will be found to be unworthy to be presented to God, as it is not for Him alone that we have done it; on the contrary, we have done nothing but misuse His grace.

The actions which appeared indifferent and harmless will, perhaps, be judged to be sins, because we have lost the time and the opportunities which were afforded us for serving God better.

Those which are bad will be discovered to be all the more criminal on account of their number, and the habit that we indulged in of following our own inclinations.

I confessed before God, that were I to die, I could not escape the

terrible sentence of condemnation; I acknowledged that the judgment of creatures was very different from that of God, and that therefore I ought not to rely upon it, nor upon my own. I will judge myself according to the judgment of God, in order to avoid this terrible sentence; and I will not rely on that of men, who judge according to their maxims or their affections, and not according to truth. I have resolved seriously to live no more according to my own will, but according to that of God, and to remember as much as possible that it is not the devil, the world, or myself who will judge me, but God, and that sooner than I think for: I must make haste to work and redeem the time.

THIRD DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

There is more harm and sin in our inclinations than we think for.

I have discovered an infinity of sins in my inclinations. I am heartily ashamed of them, and I asked pardon of God for all the faults that I do not know on account of their number; and, above all, I have taken great shame to myself not to have endeavoured to root out the beginnings of sin.

I have made the resolution to separate myself from them whatever it may cost me, and to lay the axe to their root. I made acts of contrition, of trust, and of confidence in God, who inspired me with the idea that I must labour seriously to be disengaged from all which is not Himself. I have seen many things in a new light, and I remain in the hope that He will fill me with Himself, in proportion as I shall empty myself of creatures; and that the will of God in me is that I should lead a supernatural life, and not a natural one, in order to imitate Him in His life, since He ought to be my sole end.

SECOND MEDITATION.

That lukewarmness is a greater evil than we think.

It seems to me that it is not serving God to serve him lazily, and to follow my natural inclinations, leaving undone a part of what I ought to do; and when I feel a little more love of God I serve Him with greater joy and fidelity; it is evident that I follow my own inclinations, without considering, or very little,

what God desires from me, which is the cause of my not improving and not advancing in perfection.

I have resolved to pay more attention to the motives of my actions than I have done, in order to perform them for God, and according to His spirit, above all in all that concerns His service. I will perform all my pious exercises regularly, without consulting my own inclinations, and whatever may have been ordered for me, without allowing myself to set them aside, according as I may feel disposed.

Our Lord gave me the idea that He was my master, and that I had not yet begun to serve Him ; that he could not permit me to have any other affection in my heart but for Him alone ; that He was jealous, and that my heart was too small to contain Him. I detested my lukewarmness, and offered Him my heart that He should inflame it with His love.

I told a falsehood and quite deceived myself when I said and thought that I served God.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On Hell.

I saw that the torment of being deprived of God is extreme, as those who are damned could have enjoyed His presence, if they had chosen to struggle against their inclinations in what appeared to them to be trifles, but which, however, will cause them to suffer torments which they will have to endure eternally ; but, indeed, I discovered that if I do not struggle bravely against my own inclinations they will lead me where these poor wretches are. I must then fight in order to gain the victory.

I am then resolved to fight, by watchfulness, by keeping silence, by praying earnestly alone or with others ; and that for how long? Until my death. Against what? Against myself, against my inclinations, against self-love, pride, impatient temper, laziness, hastiness, tenderness for myself, and all impurity of heart. What arms shall I employ? A spirit of hatred and harshness towards myself, of mortification, confidence, submission, and obedience. Who will fight with me? God.

V.

NARRATIVE OF MADAME DE MIRAMION'S LIFE WRITTEN BY HERSELF, IN OBEDIENCE TO HER DIRECTOR, M. JOLLY.

1677.

As a child, God gave me much grace; the distress that I felt at not having loved my mother sufficiently made me form the resolution of imitating her after her death. I was often pre-occupied with the idea of being a nun, and afterwards of entering into religion, yet without making vows, in order to assist the poor. The ideas that I formed of helping them have been put into execution.

A nursery governess taught me to pray, and instructed me in the things of God. She did me much good. I lived with an aunt who was very fond of the world, but I soon got tired of society, balls, and plays. A man-servant died one Twelfth-night; it was the first person I ever saw die. My father's death happened soon afterwards. I married with the intention of living piously. I chose my husband on account of his mother's piety. I married at fifteen and a half, firmly resolved to live according to my ideas of what was right. I gave up playing cards, and going to balls and theatres, which caused great surprise. I led a strict life, and persuaded my husband to do the same. Our only conversation together was upon serious things or upon death. We were very united, and much beloved by all our family, and our only dispute was that he wished to induce me to amuse myself more.

I became a widow on All Soul's Day, 1645, a few hours before I was sixteen. It was a great grief to me. I thought I should have died of sorrow. I was in the family-way, and my daughter's life was in danger. I made a vow, and placed her under the protection of the Holy Virgin, and I got better. I did it to obtain that she should live to be baptized. I had the small-pox at the end of the year, and thought I should have died of it. In the second year I had a great many offers of marriage, but I was so afflicted I would not listen to them. There was in the same house with me a person who urged me greatly, and all the family desired it. I required a great deal of courage to resist him. Two years and some months after my widowhood I was

run away with by a man who wanted to force me to marry him. God gave me grace and courage, and I did not lose my presence of mind. The first thing I had asked from Him was to be continually in His presence, and always full of trust in Him. He granted me these three things, and a fourth, which was not to offend Him. On this occasion he gave me the courage and strength to defend myself; and in fact a courage which could only come from Himself. I was more than thirty-six hours without taking any food. Even after I was set at liberty, once or twice the endeavour was again made to carry me off, but I went to Sainte Marie. On returning home after my abduction I fell dangerously ill, and received extreme unction. I carried on a lawsuit against M. de Bussy for two years, but then forgave him for the love of God. After this my family urged me still more to marry again. I was somewhat tempted to do it for fear of being carried off again. I had much difficulty in deciding on what I ought to do. I could not make up my mind, and asked the advice of a wise Director. At the age of nineteen years and some months, on Christmas-Day, being before the Blessed Sacrament, at Saint Nicolas des Champs, God spoke to my heart, again on New Year's Day, and still more strongly on the feast of the Epiphany.

The day of the Holy name of Jesus, I formed the resolution of making a retreat at Mademoiselle Legras', and I went there the following day to learn the will of God concerning me. The third day He made it known to me. M. Vincent was consulted. Since then I have never changed my mind, nor doubted for one moment that I had done right. I made a vow of chastity on the feast of the Purification; I made it till Christmas, but at Christmas I made it for ever.

I changed my furniture, and adopted a very simple style of dress, wearing neither colours, gold, nor silver. I tried to live by rule. I had great difficulty in bearing all the raillery of which I was the object, and even my Director was a great trial to me. I began to visit the poor, especially those who were ashamed to beg, as well as the hospitals and prisons. I began to take great interest in the poor, but my Director deprived me of doing so for a whole year, because I took too much pleasure in it.

I lived with my husband's parents, and assisted them at their death, as also almost all the family. We lived together in per-

fect harmony and love. I had the superintendence of my daughter's affairs, as I was her guardian. At four-and-twenty I asked my brothers to live with me, so as to make a home for them. I had much difficulty in bringing up my daughter, for she had long and dangerous illnesses which grieved me greatly; but I offered her freely to God. I was also often ill myself. The doctors discovered that I had a cancer, and ever after I suffered from constant sickness. I placed my daughter at Sainte Marie at seven and a half years of age.

I occupied myself in having missions preached, in establishing schools and charities for the sick poor in the villages; I learned how to doctor and bleed, and distributed clothes among the poor. I had a closet where I had all sorts of things for them; this I did in remembrance of God's impressing so strongly on me in my prayers while yet very young, that I was to take care of the temporal and spiritual wants of the poor. It was with this intention also that I established charity schools, remembering the good my governess had done me.

I went into retreat every year.

I married my daughter at fourteen and a half years of age, after much anxiety and many prayers.

I lost him who guided me, which caused me great grief. I had already imagined a kind of community to live in imitation of Saint Paul. I always wished to be a nun, but it was not judged advisable by my superiors.

After my Director's death I continued to receive young persons to live in community with me, although I always wished to withdraw into some convent far away. I took M. Ferret for my Director and Superior of this community, which I destined for the service of God and of the poor, without taking out letters patent, not choosing to have them for fear of being more burdened before God.

God has from time to time given me great graces in my devotion, and in fact at all times; He has given them me in prayer, in the Holy Communion, and in all the temptations I have had against faith, purity, and humility.

I undertook the works I am now doing, and that not without difficulty, but God and obedience urged me to do it. The statutes of this joint community were drawn up and God poured forth great graces upon us. I purchased this house amidst

difficulties of every kind. I bought the one for the retreats in the same manner, but God urged me on. I have obtained the favour of having the blessed Sacrament in our house. God was urgent with me for that, and He has given great blessings to the retreats.

One day before the blessed Sacrament I had a strong idea that God had given me this painful sickness for so many years only to teach me to live a life of penance.

The desire of going to be a nun has never left me.

VI.

PIOUS MEDITATIONS OF MADAME DE MIRAMION.

NINETEENTH RETREAT, AND THE FIRST MADE UNDER THE DIRECTION OF M. JOLLY, THE 13TH SEPTEMBER, 1677.

My Intentions.

I HOPE everything through the goodness and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, through His childhood, His death, and His resurrection, by the mediation of the very holy Virgin, my mother and mistress; by that of Saint Peter, Saint Paul, Saint Joseph, Saint Nicolas, Saint François de Sales, Saint Jérome, Sainte Géneviève, Sainte Teresa, and Saint Augustin.

I undertake this retreat with the design of promoting the greater glory of God and to obtain by His goodness a true and holy humility, love of humiliation, gentleness, patience, condescension, obedience, love of contradiction, and to ask for thoughtfulness and conformity to God's will, giving myself entirely up to Him alone.

Principal thoughts for my retreat, and which ought to serve me all my life.

I have had given me for meditation the thoughts of Sainte Teresa upon the *Pater.*

FIRST DAY.

Our Father which art in Heaven.

I AM filled with great confidence, seeing that I have God for my Father, who is infinitely great, good, and powerful, on whom

everything depends, and who has created everything for his children; but I have dwelt much more upon what He has done for our souls by coming into the world, living and dying there, suffering all sorts of humiliations and contradictions, and practising obedience, poverty, and charity for us. I saw that he had desired greatly all these things, even unto death, and that He was satiated with them for the love of us. I am full of confusion at His example, and I have begged of him to give me the grace to imitate Him in everything and to sustain me with His grace on all occasions; I entered into all the details of my past life to obtain His forgiveness, and for the future I desire with all my heart an increase of those virtues for the attainment of which I have offered myself to Him without reserve. I am full of confusion at the little use I have hitherto made of the grace to love Him as my Father, not only for myself but for all men. I throw myself at His feet like the prodigal son; ask Him, as He is almighty and omnipotent, to take from me all that prevents my being a faithful child, and to grant me the grace to be so.

Being at church before the blessed Sacrament, I strove to examine narrowly what I could do to humble myself more.

SECOND DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

Hallowed be Thy name.

Several dishonour it and profane it, others venerate it. The first are the lukewarm, among whom I find myself; the second are the ungodly, who profane it; and those who honour it are the angels and the saints, and all creatures in so far as they serve to lead men to God.

I united myself to our Lord, feeling that I was born upon earth to honour and sanctify His holy name; and in union with the heavenly host resolved to cause this holy Name to be sanctified by the occupations of this community, in the schools, among the poor, in retreat, and, above all, among ourselves. I asked for this grace from God through Jesus Christ, and with this intention I will strive to perform all my actions with a more vivid realisation of the holy presence of God.

SECOND MEDITATION.

Thy kingdom come.

I asked to be united to Him for eternity, and as He is Himself this kingdom, that He would come and establish it in me at once. I saw that there are kingdoms of pride, self-love, and haughtiness, of want of charity and obedience, and that the reign of God could not be fully established in me until all these things were destroyed. I addressed myself to my God, looking upon Him as my King and Almighty, as my Father full of charity and loving-kindness; and I prayed Him to destroy in me all these great defects, and that by His omnipotence He would give me the opposite virtues. I threw myself at His feet, imploring Him to take away from and put in me all that he saw fit.

It seemed to me that He showed me that if I were faithful in corresponding to His grace that He would dwell with me as He dwells with His Father and His Father in Him; that there I should drink deeply of that water of life more delicious than honey; that then I should draw abundantly from His sacred breasts, and drink luxuriously from living fountains. But that I could only arrive at this happy state of the perfect reign of God in me by humility, charity to my neighbour, love of God, poverty, patience under contradiction, and obedience; that the perfect practice of these virtues would destroy the reign of the enemies of God in me, and raise me to Him; that conformity to His Divine will, no matter what it cost me, would unite me to Him, and that the perfect love which desires Him alone would bring about this perfect union of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with my poor self.

I annihilated myself before Him in Spirit, and asked of Him to take away and to put in me all He pleased, fully and without hindrance, that he might find His good pleasure in me.

THIRD DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

Continuation of the same subject.

Thinking only of establishing God's reign in us.

My heart poured itself forth in His holy presence while meditating on these words, considering that I have no other occupa-

tion than to prepare a kingdom in myself for Him, a Jerusalem in which he can reign and establish Himself entirely, as an absolute Master; I saw that this kingdom could not be agreeable to Him if it were not built of certain precious stones, which he esteems and which the world despises, and which by nature I could not bear. It seemed to me that He made known to me that if I built Him this Jerusalem, He would dwell in it with pleasure, that there He would unite Himself to me, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who are one God, would establish themselves there, would reign there, and I with them.

I perceived that this kingdom ought to be built with great magnificence, and that there must be many apartments; the first of mortification, crosses, trouble, sighs, regret for sin, of interior and exterior crucifixion.

The second, of humility and abnegation, exterior and interior.

The third, of obedience, submission, love of contradiction, and submission.

The fourth, of poverty, of self-denial in the comforts and conveniences of life and of everything created; for myself in particular, for my family, my community, and all the rest.

The fifth, of charity, long-suffering, gentleness, affability, courtesy and civility, giving up my natural character, my demeanour, my air, my proud and haughty tone, which is more suitable for a lady in the world, than for a spouse of our Lord full of abnegation and charity.

The sixth, of submission, conformity to the will of my heavenly Father and King, with an utter abandonment into His hands of all that I am, and of all this community, and of everything relating to me.

It appeared to me that He would delight in being there, that He would give Himself unreservedly to me, that there I should enjoy Him fully, but that it would necessarily cost me much to build this kingdom for God; but that since He desired it, I would do it wholly and entirely without procrastination or remissness; what trouble does not a favourite take to receive an earthly king in his house; and this is the King of kings; I will neither sleep nor eat until I have built a house for the Lord according to His heart's desire.

SECOND MEDITATION OF THE THIRD DAY

Was again on the same subject.

I saw that it would be impossible for me to make this building without being aided by extraordinary grace. The Lord encouraged me much, and gave me to understand that He had bought the materials with His blood, that He had discovered these precious stones for me, that He had cut and polished them by His own performance of all those virtues which would have been insupportable and even impossible to me, if He had not brought them to light.

It seemed to me that He told me that I had only to take these precious stones and to place them in these divine apartments; that He Himself would aid me, and that I must always labour without being weary.

I formed the sincere desire of labouring at this building whatever it might cost me; this idea was at the same time painful and pleasant to me, in the prospect of enjoying my God and my King; it seemed as if He raised my heart and my soul to Him with a sweet trust, and, if I may venture to say it, in a holy union with Him, which led me to make frequent acts of love. I saw Him in His Passion, I tried to adore Him in this state as my God, my King, my Father, and my Spouse. I offered myself to Him to follow Him, and to imitate Him now and for ever.

THIRD MEDITATION.

Upon the same subject.

Afterwards these words came into my mind: "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself unto him."

I saw then that it is only necessary to love, and to do all for pure love, in order to be loved, and enter into the secrets of God, to converse with Him, and to be filled to overflowing with His grace. I abandoned myself to this living Source of love, and remained as it were swallowed up in it.

FOURTH DAY.

First Meditation.

Thy will be done.

I considered the will of God as alone good and perfect, and preferable to everything. I ardently desire to accomplish it in myself, and in this community, if not as it is in heaven at least with a thorough submission, conformity, and union. I adored this holy Will that it might deal with me, as also in what concerns my community, my daughter, what is external or within me, exteriorly and interiorly, according to His good pleasure, offering Him all in general and particular; and sacrificing everything to His will. It appeared to me that He required these sacrifices, and I made them with all my heart, it being just that He should be satisfied, and of very little importance whether I am or not.

I desired that all men should do His will, I prayed to God for them and for myself; our Lord only spoke to my heart of privations, of detachment, and of dying to myself.

At the Holy Communion I looked upon Him as my God, my King, my Father, and my Spouse, and united myself to Him in all these qualities; I experienced great consolation, hoping from His presence that He would establish in me His kingdom, and His dwelling, and everything in which He can find complacency. It seems to me that He showed me that He could not dwell there with pleasure if He did not find the six apartments, which He showed me yesterday, as written above; I again promised to work at them with the help of His grace, provided He was with me to support me in my necessities; that there must be no putting off, but that I must begin to-day without delay; He indicated certain practices to me, which He gave me the grace to put in execution.

Second Meditation.

On the same subject.

I looked upon our Lord as my Spouse whose will I must continually follow, listening to Him to learn it and to do it; a faithful wife ought to have no other will than that of her husband, and must follow him everywhere with great love; if he makes a step

in advance to show his love to her, the wife ought to make two; yet I saw this Divine Husband in humiliation, penitence, obedidience, poverty, abandonment, charity, and all that to reign in my heart and possess it. I am resolved and prepared, whatever trouble I may have, and whatever effort it may cost me, to persevere in everything in order to follow this dear Husband of my soul. He taught me to know and feel a thousand charms in this dear union, but that it must cost me dear. I respected all that was charming, and took for my share the abasement and the cross, wishing to go to Him by the same paths He had chosen to come to me. I looked upon myself as an unfaithful wife who has often left her husband, and I asked His pardon; He showed me that it was not enough to do His commandments, but that He required of me to fulfil His most holy desires, not only seeking what was agreeable to Him but what was most agreeable.

FIFTH DAY.

First Meditation.

Give us this day our daily bread.

I considered what this bread was; I saw that it was the virtues of the Gospel, holy dispositions and inspirations, good desires, readings, and thoughts, the Sacraments (especially that of the altar), with its abundant graces; I saw that I had received all these graces abundantly; I gave thanks for them, and at the same time I felt confused at having so little profited by them, and even made such a bad use of them; I could not do anything else than ask for pardon, and offer Jesus Christ to God His Father to make satisfaction for me.

Second Meditation.

Has been upon our Lord's being represented as our Shepherd, giving His life for me, feeding me with His own flesh, giving me good and abundant nourishment through His continual grace; caressing me and sustaining me with His own bread, refreshing me with His holy living and life-giving waters, putting me under the shadow of His grace, watching over me continually for fear that I should be discouraged, striking me with His crook to prevent me from wandering away from the fold, and to

bring me nearer to Him; I gave myself up to the guidance of this divine Shepherd, wishing to be as a sheep towards Him, humble, gentle, and submissive. It seemed to me that He told me inwardly that He had given me visible pastors, to teach me His will and His way; that He had chosen them for me according to my wants, that He had taken them away from me in order to raise me to a higher, a greater, and a more sublime perfection, and to make me advance by the path of an inward death; and, in short, that we must not lean upon creatures, but upon God alone. It seemed to me that He made me feel that I had counted too much upon M. Ferret.

THIRD MEDITATION.

Upon the same Subject.

Adoring and submitting myself to this Divine Shepherd for all that He may choose to do with me, and in the way He may choose, I prayed much for him whom he has given me to hold His place visibly. He gave me the grace to see the advantage I should find in sharing all His ideas without opposing or resisting Him at all. I ought to look upon myself as a blind person; and it appears to me that God makes known to me that He required a prompt and perfect submission from me.

SIXTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

Looking at our daily bread in the Blessed Sacrament.

I adored Him there, and considered Him as a fountain of living water where my soul ought to refresh itself and find new life. I have looked upon Him as a purifying Sun who must warm me with His holy love; that He was a tree of life where I may find shelter, to live on His fruit and converse with Him at my ease sheltered from my enemies, pride and others; that He was the heavenly bread of angels; but that I ought to lead a god-like life, as I was fed with the Flesh and Blood and Divinity of the Man God. I took shame to myself for my coldness, for my want of attention, my negligence, and my idleness. I admired His great goodness in the institution of this Sacrament, which appeared to me to surpass all God ever did, exposing Himself every day to be outraged by the ungodly, and by sin-

ners who receive Him unworthily. I looked upon myself as being beneath them all in consequence of the graces our Lord has given me, and my want of fidelity. I humbled myself before Him, and asked His forgiveness, and the grace, through Himself, to improve this great advantage in future. It appeared to me that perfect charity, gentleness, humility, self-abnegation, and conformity to His will were good dispositions. I asked for them by the intercession of the Holy Virgin, the holy angels, and the saints, but especially by the merits of Jesus Christ.

SECOND MEDITATION.

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.

I adored Him and acknowledged Him as my Redeemer; I endeavoured to acknowledge, to be ashamed and pained at having so often acted contrary to His commandments, against His approbation, and to have so often lost and neglected His grace, and even made such a bad use of it. I endeavoured as much as possible to feel sorrow for my sins, and for the bad use I had made of His mercy. I threw myself at His feet, and offered Himself to atone to the Eternal Father to pay all my debts. I asked Him to give me by the same channel His quickening grace, in order to overcome myself in my pride, and in my want of charity and self-denial. I remained at His feet expecting all from Him; I begged He would take me and do with me what He willed.

In the midst of this meditation I was upbraided because I ought to have waited for grace, and rather pray than act, that this was what was meant when I was told to act quietly; that I did not follow what God had formerly made known to me, and that it was that which hindered my progress towards good.

An hour after midnight, in the night between the 18th and the 19th, I heard an inward voice which awoke me suddenly, and which said to my heart that the Lord's arm is not shortened, that He had given me a guide to lead me to Him, and that I ought to have every confidence in Him; that it was not a light thought which I had had about my three Directors, that it came from Him and was true; that the first led me according to the ancient law, the second by the law of grace, conducting me to-

wards a greater love of our Lord; and that this one was to guide me onwards and upwards in the practice of perfection. I felt great gratitude towards God, thanking Him who had chosen a good director for me. God taught me to look upon that as one of the principal graces He had bestowed upon me. God made me turn over in my mind all that this third Director had said to me, and I found great sweetness in it. And our Lord told me above all (this is M. Jolly's advice), to say very little in admonishing the sisters, but to pray a great deal, and give them merely hints when I want to persuade them to do such and such things, and then wait the moment of God's grace. He told me besides to act with them like the good Shepherd, and as our Saviour did with His apostles, who were persons without much intelligence, and who did not understand what our Lord said to them. Yet he condescended to reason with them, and lived with them as brethren.

"Patience, charity, gentleness, and an example of sincere humility," (He said to me), "will have more effect than fine speeches." And very often persons do not choose that others should help in their salvation. They prefer that it should come directly from God and themselves; but for all that you must speak to them from time to time as it is appointed, and when they are well-disposed. And above all, (said M. Jolly,) obedience must be joined to good works.

According to this last advice, I have formed the resolution of asking his permission about everything. I felt much comfort, and gratitude towards God, by which my heart was greatly consoled. The daily practice of these virtues which were practised and cherished by our Lord himself ought to be very precious to me, and I will strive always to walk in his steps.

SEVENTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION,

Was on the same subject: Forgive us.

I desire with all my heart to throw myself at the feet of our Lord, to ask His forgiveness for myself, for my family, and my community. I strove to share in the sufferings of our Lord, and offered them to the Eternal Father for the same persons,

and in His presence I have promised to forgive with all my heart those who may have offended against me, and all those who may do so in future.

SECOND MEDITATION.

Lead us not into temptation.

My heart and mind were fixed on the above subject of meditation.

Lead us not into temptation.

I showed myself to this great Physician as being ill and very weak, and begged that He would heal me. I laid before Him my principal diseases, and told Him that from Him alone I expected help in all my temptations, particularly those which come in spite of my resolutions. I made several acts of abandonment and of confidence in Him.

RESOLUTIONS OF MY RETREAT.

Begun the 13th of September, 1677.

To serve as a rule for the conduct I am to observe towards the sisters of the community, and the virtues that I ought to practise.

My resolutions to which I hope faithfully to adhere by the intercession and the merits of the birth, death, and resurrection of our Lord, by the intercession of the Holy Virgin, and of all the saints my protectors, are as follows :—

WITH RESPECT TO THE COMMUNITY.

I will look upon it as God's work with which He has charged me by the decrees of His providence and of which he will require me to render Him a particular account. It is His will that I should govern it according to His will and spirit and not according to mine ; and for that I must ask for orders and advice from my superiors, and follow them exactly, as if it were our Lord Himself who had given them to me. When I have done amiss in something important I will confess it humbly to him, but in order to obtain the necessary graces I will every day recite a *Veni Sancte*, a *Salve Regina*, the *Pater*, and the *Credo*, and the anthem of Sainte Géneviève, and a little litany of my holy protectors, and will make an act of humility before God in acknowledgment of my unworthiness to direct this work,

and one of confidence in the goodness of my Lord and my God.

I will seek, by the grace of our Lord, His glory alone, and the spiritual welfare of my dear sisters. As to myself, I only desire to accomplish His holy will, that He may do it in me and by me, and I acknowledge that if there be anything well done it will be thanks to Him alone.

I. I will love them all equally in God and for God, not showing more affection to one than the other without necessity.

II. I will not fail to speak every three months at least to our sisters, to each one in private, and oftener if they desire it, and I will endeavour, by the grace of our Lord, to do it in a gentle, loving, courteous, and even respectful way.

III. Every time that I speak to a sister about her soul I will ask God for our Lord's sake to give me all wisdom and proper dispositions, so that it shall not be my spirit which inspires my words, but His.

IV. I will give them all the time they require to tell me what they wish without appearing to be in a hurry, and will not think lightly of their little troubles, although I will sometimes tell them they ought to despise them themselves; and this according to circumstances; for as to myself I will always pay attention to everything which concerns them.

V. I will not let the sisters perceive that I understand what they want to say to me before they have said all, but give them time to explain themselves fully. I will seek inspiration from God to reply to them; and even when I see what I ought to say I will not do it hastily, in order to let them satisfy themselves by telling all their troubles, and letting them see that I listen to them. That will have the advantage of exercising both my patience and charity.

VI. Whenever the sisters come to me, and when I am with them, I will take care, by the grace of our Lord, not to allow myself to show my natural disposition, which is proud, haughty, and imperious, or put on a conceited or arrogant manner, all of which are more suitable for a natural and worldly person than for the spouse of Jesus Christ, who should be full of abnegation and charity.

VII. I will treat them with courtesy and kindness. I will bow to them when they come in or go out, when they pass before me

or when they approach me, or when I go in or out from where they are.

VIII. I will speak to them in gentle and courteous terms, such as are rather expressive of dependence than independence.

IX. When I want anything from them I will say to them, "I beg of you, my dear sister, to do so and so."

X. When they do anything for me I will thank them in the same way.

XI. I will not permit them to remain on their knees or on the floor. I will always insist on their sitting on chairs.

XII. I will be very familiar with them, allowing them perfect liberty.

XIII. I will cheerfully grant all they ask from me when I think it can be done; if not, I will express my regret, and will give them some reason for my refusal.

XIV. I will help them in their troubles and weaknesses, and encourage them in their temptations.

XV. If I am obliged to admonish them in private or in public, I will do my best not to discourage them, and not allow them to remain cast down for a long time; and this above all if I am compelled to do it severely, which I never will do without preparing myself for it before God, and taking the advice of my Superior, or at least of the Council, if the thing is public.

XVI. I will do all I can, through the grace of God, only to find fault with them according to God's spirit in the chapters, in the obediences, or in the conferences; or even day by day if it be necessary.

XVII. I will do all I can to open my heart to them, and to let them see that I am full of affection and charity towards them.

XVIII. I will take great care of them in their illnesses and infirmities, and let them want for nothing. I will visit them myself, and tend them with care and attention.

XIX. I will always take great care that they shall have all that is necessary for their temporal wants.

XX. I will not show any impatience at their faults or dispositions or at their way of speaking, but only express my grief and pity for them if they have done wrong. I will urge them to pray and will pray for them.

XXI. I will endeavour to make amends for their faults before

God by acts of penance, being convinced that I shall not cure one evil by another, but rather by kindness and self-sacrifice.

XXII. I will never by the help of God, say unkind, offensive, or bitter things to them, and I will never make jokes which may offend or wound them.

XXIII. I will not afflict those who are already sad, but I will endeavour to cheer and comfort them.

XXIV. I will persuade them to live together in perfect unity, charity, and courtesy; to be respectful to one another, particularly to those who hold any office, and to those who are faithful to God's grace. I will be very devout to our Lord, in order to aid them to advance as much as He desires.

XXV. I will abstain from finding fault with the sisters in private as I have hitherto done; I will seldom punish them, and will only admonish them when it is a thing of great importance; say very little to them, and when they urge me I will only hint to them what I mean, making allusions to the desire I have for their salvation, letting them reflect how wrong they are to doubt God's goodness. I will implore of Him to enlighten them, and, whatever they may say, keep myself in God's presence without being pained or astonished, but recommend them to Him. I must study the way in which our Saviour dealt with His apostles, in order to act in the same manner with the sisters, like a good shepherd.

XXVI. If a sister should say anything which takes me by surprise or annoys me, have recourse immediately to our Lord, who is the first Superior of this house; and if I commit any fault endeavour to make amends for it at once, and own it without false shame.

XXVII. I confess that all this will be impossible for me without the help of a powerful and ever-present grace. I look for it from my Divine Master, whose presence I greatly require to keep me in check and not allow me to my own will, and raising me to Himself by humility, charity, and obedience.

XXVIII. I will accept contradiction and contempt from the sisters both in great and small things.

XXIX. I will assemble the sisters composing the Council every fortnight, and will follow their advice, although it should be contrary to mine, without showing any annoyance or disappointment.

XXX. I will do nothing new without the permission of my Superior, and I will ask his advice in every important affair of the community, both private and public, which advice I will follow.

XXXI. I will cast aside all my own opinions and inclinations to submit myself completely to obedience.

XXXII. Before God I will look upon myself as beneath the feet of all the sisters, acknowledging that I am more unworthy of the grace of God than the humblest of them by my sins and infirmities; I will often beg of them to pray to God for me, and I will pray doubly for those who give me the most trouble.

XXXIII. If I see or learn that one of the sisters is annoyed with me, that my conduct displeases her, and that she disapproves of it, I will confess before God and before all creatures that she is right; I will do my best to serve this sister, and will endeavour to please her. I will act in the same way if I feel any dislike to one of them, which, thank God, is not the case now. I will never be angry at their not liking me, and if they tell me so I will express my gratitude to them for their confidence, and not appear surprised or pained about anything, and never refer to it afterwards to them, unless they do so themselves.

XXXIV. I will sympathise with the sisters in their exterior and interior troubles, and in those in connection with their family. I will not urge them to tell me their troubles, when I think they do not desire to do so, and will not show any feeling about it, nor be jealous if they wish to speak to any other person more enlightened than myself; and when I think there is a necessity for it, I will advise their doing so.

VII.

LETTER FROM MADAME DE MIRAMION TO M. JOLLY.

I WAS born blind, and consequently am more difficult to be cured. The disease is inveterate, as it began fifty years ago, and has always gone on increasing. This thought grieves me, for I fear I shall never change. But I have seen that what is impossible to me is not to grace, if I am only faithful to it. I cannot help telling you that I feel an ardent desire for an in-

crease of the love of God in my heart, and this is a subject of deep humiliation for me, seeing that our Lord has solicited me for such a long time in vain. If it were only necessary to become a Sister of Charity in order to have their virtues, I should at once ask for this favour. I speak in all sincerity, for nothing else appears suitable for me. As to myself, I do not care what road I take, provided I arrive at the goal. I do not care who I am, or what I do, provided I perform my Master's will. Sister of Charity, Lay-sister in a little convent far away from Paris, to be under obedience, and practise the virtues of humiliation and self-abnegation, would be, according to my own idea, the best and the surest road for me.

MARIE BONNEAU DE MIRAMION.

Sainte Géneviève, 24th October, 1679.

VIII.

LETTER FROM M. JOLLY TO MADAME DE MIRAMION.

I THINK you have acted wisely, Madame, in preferring a life of usefulness to your neighbour, to the consolation you might have had in going into retirement as you wished to do. If you have a little leisure for attending to yourself according to your wish, take advantage of it; but if God chooses that you should serve Him otherwise, obey Him cheerfully.

It is always a good inspiration to seek to humble oneself; but it is necessary to keep within bounds as regards exterior mortification. If you wish to do anything extraordinary in the chapter you can do it; as also to ask two or three of your sisters if they have remarked anything to find fault with in you.

I do not consider that you are strong enough to wash up the dishes, nor to wait at table; take care of your health in order to perform your duties of charity, which is the queen of virtues, and do not break your night's rest.

Do not keep back anything, but offer yourself as a willing sacrifice to God, allowing Him to dispose freely of you, and of all belonging to you, and receiving with joy and thanksgiving all that He ordains. For my own part, I will help you as much as possible to detach yourself from all creatures, and from yourself, in order that you may be perfectly united to Him whom you have chosen as your spouse.

Ask Him, I beg of you, my conversion during this holy season, and that I may reap some advantage likewise from the graces He gives you, that I may profit by your good example during the remainder of my days.

IX.

A LETTER FROM MADAME DE MIRAMION TO A NUN WHO WAS NOT SURE OF HER VOCATION.

As you desire it so earnestly, my dear sister, I will write you a few words on the subject of our conversation, although I am most unworthy and unfit to do so. Every Christian is obliged to reach forward to perfection, but particularly a nun. To whom much is given, from them much will be required; try to remember, my dear sister, that there are but two ways to go to God—innocence and penitence: if you have lost the first, you must have recourse to the second; far from running away from it, you must embrace it and cherish it in a spirit of faith, of confidence, and of the love of God. God has withdrawn you from your old home as He withdrew His people from Egypt, to set you at liberty to serve Him; He has spoken to your heart, He has opened your eyes, He has healed you of your leprosy, and has cast out the devil which possessed you; but take care that this devil does not do as it is said in the Gospel, and take to himself seven other devils more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell in you; it is easier to be converted from one sin which inspires horror, than from several which do not appear so great, and which are all the more displeasing to God because they are spiritual, and that he has given you the necessary light and grace to get rid of them.

The Son of Man had not where to lay His head, but He never complained about it. You have the right, my dear sister, to ask for what you require with humility and gentleness; if it is given to you, be grateful for it, but if it be not given because it is not obligatory, do not complain, but bear these little privations quietly, offering them to our Lord in order to be more like Him. As it is so painful to you to be supported by the house where you now are, do not add to this burden a second one, which is to be unedifying, and to show

yourself discontented, or to receive ungraciously the charity they bestow upon you, and from which you derive such small advantage; through God's grace, strive now to do just the reverse, and repay them by gratitude, good example, and the performance of every duty. Be very exact in the daily devotions which God requires of you; that is to say, do not do it to please yourself, but seek only to please God, and to practise the virtues which are laid upon you,—that is to say, humility and mortification. Do not rest satisfied at your body being before God; let your heart be there also; all through the day make continual acts of faith, hope, charity, humility, contrition, abandonment, submission to God, and conformity to His will.

Try to say nothing sharp or bitter to the sisters; on the contrary, speak to them always with courtesy, charity, humility and gentleness, and if you happen to fall into your old habits do not go to bed without having done penance and having deeply humbled yourself for it. If the fault was committed before several persons, ask pardon of the abbess and of that particular sister, and this with the intention of amending yourself, and giving satisfaction to God and your neighbour whom you have offended and scandalised; it is the only means of destroying your pride and casting out of you the evil spirit, who will do all he can to dissuade you from this practice.

Remember that if you are ashamed of doing anything for Jesus, He will be ashamed to recognize you as one of His own flock before His Father. God resists the proud, and will confound the haughty. He who humbleth himself shall be exalted; every one loves humble persons, and takes exception against the proud, and however much we may dislike humiliation it is impossible to be humble unless we practise it.

I do not doubt, my dear mother, that God desires from you very great and deep humiliations, that you should be content to be under obligations to everybody, and to be looked upon as nothing. Remember that to nothing nothing is due. This position is the way of attaining great perfection, if you only knew how to take advantage of it. When you have arrived at a state of mind which shall correspond faithfully to this great grace, perhaps God will do something for your temporal wants; but until you become all He desires, you will not have what

you wish for. God foresees, perhaps, that you would be unbearable, so great would be your glory and your joy at no longer being a burden to any one, and it would be difficult to please you. Perhaps this does not seem so to you now, but God knows very well how matters stand. He knows what is good for you better than you do for yourself. "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all other things shall be added unto you."

Take our Lord as your example in everything—in speaking, thinking, and acting. He did all that you do every day except sin; that is why you ought to keep your eyes always fixed upon Him, as a portrait-painter looks at the person whose likeness he is taking. When you pray, see how He prayed; when you are talking, see how He conversed; and the same in eating, sleeping, silence, and work. When you are tempted, see how He acted under temptation, and what He did to resist it; when you are ill, look at Him in His Passion; and when you are grieved to be so poor, look at Him in the manger, and still more in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar; when you imagine that people despise you, look at Jesus, working in Saint Joseph's shop, dragged like a criminal along the streets of Jerusalem, and at last crucified between two thieves.

He created you, dear mother, only to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him, and to imitate His life. Who are they to whom God does not suffice? Act so that grace may altogether overcome nature in you.

Do nothing of which you will have to repent, and do penance in this world that you may have less in purgatory.

X.

MADAME DE MIRAMION'S WILL, WRITTEN IN HER OWN HANDWRITING.

1688.

IN the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, the holy and adorable Trinity.

I, undersigned, Marie Bonneau, widow of the late Messire Jean Jacques de Beauharnais, Lord of Miramion, Counsellor of the Court of Parliament of Paris, have made and make my will as follows:—

I desire with all my heart, with the aid of God's grace, and

assisted by the prayers of the Holy Virgin, to die as a true daughter of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church, to which I submit myself entirely, and will submit myself until the last moment of my life.

Prostrated before the Majesty of God, I confess before heaven and earth that I am a very great sinner, having grievously offended His sovereign goodness by a vast number of sins, and the misuse of His grace, for which I beg His forgiveness with all my heart, and I implore of Him by the merits of the precious Blood and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the intercession of the Holy Virgin, of the apostles Saint Peter and Saint Paul, Saint Joseph, Sainte Géneviève, my guardian angel, and all the saints, and by the intercession of the Holy Church, to forgive me and to turn away His eyes from my iniquity.

desire to spend the rest of my life in true penitence and sorrow for my sins, and it is my desire and will that, by the same grace, the last moments of my life should be full of real faith, strong hope, and perfect charity, which will cause me to die for the love, in the love, and by the love of God alone, as also in true charity towards my neighbour, and abnegation of myself.

I ask and implore of the infinite goodness of Jesus Christ not to abandon me at the hour of my death ; to place His sufferings between the justice of God His Father and my judgment ; and I beseech the Blessed Virgin to present me to her Son on that dreadful day.

I wish to die fortified with all the sacraments of the Church.

I ask pardon from all those whom I have offended, and I forgive every one with all my heart.

I also ask pardon of the Président de Nesmond, my very dear son-in-law, and of my very dear daughter for all the trouble I have given them, as also to my very dear brothers and all my family.

I beseech all my dear and much loved sisters of Sainte Géneviève to forget and to forgive also all the trouble I have given them in particular and in general.

Uniting myself in my last moments to the death of my Lord and my God, I make the sacrifice of my life to Him, and commit my spirit into His hands, beseeching Him to receive it in His mercy. I offer to Him by this will a portion of the fortune

He gave me. I desire that all my debts be paid immediately, and reparation made for the wrongs I may have done, if there be any.

I desire that my body should be buried in the cemetery with the sisters, and like them, without any other ceremony, or any hangings excepting those which it is customary to put at the door of the community as it is laid down in our constitutions; wooden candlesticks and no other lights; a wooden coffin carried by the poor of the parish who are really needy, to whom clothing shall be given, as also to the poor children who carry candlesticks and wax tapers; they too must be of the parish.

Three annual masses are to be said during three years; that is to say, a mass every day in our chapel at Saint Nicolas, at the hour our sisters go to church to hear mass, to ask pardon from God by this holy sacrifice for all my sins, and above all for my want of fidelity to His grace, and to make amends for all my shortcomings with respect to the Blessed Sacrament.

I beg of the priests of the community of Saint Nicolas to say for the repose of my soul, and of all those who are in purgatory, a thousand masses; my daughter will give them a thousand pounds for this purpose. I thank this holy community for all the kindness they have ever shown me. I beg of them to continue it to the dear sisters of Sainte Géneviève, and I request them to remember my misery before God.

I give to the said community of Saint Nicolas fifteen hundred pounds for the Clerical Burse; my daughter will pay the interest of it so long as she chooses.

I leave five hundred pounds for the poor of the parish who are ashamed to beg, to be spent in beds for separating the children, and for procuring them work, and finding them clothing and bread. I give another five hundred pounds for the same object. These two donations are to be distributed according to the advice of the *curé* and my daughter, little by little according to present necessity.

I give three hundred pounds down to our sick poor at once.

I give to the fund of Saint Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, our parish, six thousand pounds, to aid in re-imbursing the Ursuline nuns of Sainte Avoie, to which this fund owes twelve thousand francs by a deed dated July, 1666, to which deed I engaged myself by a private written promise, made and witnessed by Simonet

notary; and the said written promise has remained in the hands of the above-mentioned nuns as security for what is owing to them; otherwise they would not have lent this money, which was absolutely necessary to finish the church, which would have fallen into ruins without it. The present legacy of six thousand francs is not to be delivered until my written promise is given up by the nuns.

I give to the great Hospital four hundred pounds; to the Refuge three hundred pounds; to the Foundling Hospital three hundred pounds.

I give to Madame Chevalier, for the poor of the provinces, three hundred pounds; and for the Hôtel Dieu, a hundred and fifty pounds.

I give to our dear Sisters of Charity, opposite Saint Lazare, three hundred pounds. I esteem them, and respect their humility and charity.

I give to the community of Foreign Missions seventy-five pounds a year for the missions, which my daughter can buy off when she chooses for fifteen hundred pounds. I have the greatest interest in and love for this work.

I give to the Ave Maria, to the Sisters of the Magdalen, and to the Capucin nuns, fifty pounds to each of these three convents, to have a share in their prayers. I only wish I could give them more.

I give two hundred pounds for the poor prisoners. My dear daughter will please to bestow this charity herself.

I give to my sisters of the community of Sainte Géneviève for the dispensary a hundred pounds a year, which may be redeemed for two thousand pounds. I beg my daughter not to redeem this little revenue for a long time.

I give, also, to the above-mentioned sisters fifty pounds a year in aid of the retreat for the poor at Christmas. I should much like to found at least one, but I fear to overburden my dear daughter.

I also give to the said community fifty pounds a year to help in supporting the work-room of the parish. I do not venture to give them more for the same reason as above.

I particularly beg my very dear daughter to take as much care as she can of these three above-mentioned charities, which are very dear to me, because God is honoured by them, and our neighbour aided, both in spiritual and temporal things.

I give to my very dear sisters of the Providence of God in the faubourg Saint Marceau seventy-five pounds a year, which may be bought in for fifteen hundred pounds. I esteem them greatly for the very great good that they do. I beg of them to pray to God for me, and I ask their forgiveness for the bad example I have given them, and also for the trouble I have given them, whether in general or in particular. I implore of them, for Jesus Christ's sake, to continue to be active and attentive to the work that God has confided to them, which tends greatly to the glory of God.

I have forgotten to ask my daughter in the beginning of this will to do me the charity to give a thousand masses, to whoever she thinks fit, as soon as possible after my death. She will give some to the Providence, and to the Ursuline nuns, who have no masses, and to the *curés* of my brother De Purnon in Poitou, who are poor.

I give to the coachman who shall be in my service at the time of my death, as many times fifty francs as there are years that he is in my service, and the same to my footman; and instead of giving them mourning, let them have a hundred pounds each: it will be more useful to them.

I have already given, and I give again, so far as it is necessary by this present will, all my furniture, linen, which is or shall be in the community, and of which there is very little, excepting some pictures, which I also give them.

I implore of this very dear community, whom I love dearly, to beg of God to grant me mercy, and to forgive me all my shortcomings; if God grants me the grace to possess Him, I will pray for them one and all. I beg of them to offer to God their prayers and good works, to make satisfaction for what I have not done, or what I have done carelessly. I beg this dear community ever to remain in the spirit of true and perfect charity and unity among themselves as they are at present, if it be possible; if they are firmly united, the world and hell cannot harm them, especially if this virtue be accompanied by a true humility and love of abnegnation: if they desire to rise and to shine in the world, it is greatly to be feared that God will withdraw His grace which He has hitherto poured out on them so abundantly. I beg of them, with all the tenderness of my heart, to be exact in the observance of their statutes

and daily exercises, and, above all, in their meditation. I recommend them to be obedient, without which they cannot be agreeable to God; and, I assure them, that it is the life and soul of a community, without which it cannot exist. The special spirit which ought to animate this community, is that of charity, for it is its source and the origin of its foundation. I beg of them to seek fresh strength from God after my death, in order to do better than during my life. This I say only to excite them to greater efforts, for I have every reason to be satisfied with them. I implore them to keep up all the good works of this community as far as they can; if they cannot do everything that I have done as regards the poor, at least let them do a little, without thinking of giving them up altogether. God will grant them the grace afterwards to do more. I implore of them to take great interest in the schools, which do an inexpressible amount of good, when they are conducted in so Christian a manner as those of the community. They must not forget to hold themselves in readiness to go into the country if it be thought advisable; it does much good. To conclude, my dear sisters, be faithful to God, and He will not fail you, but will give you abundant grace and benedictions; this is what I earnestly implore of Him. I beg of you, once more, not to leave off being exact in going to the Parish Church, and always to set a good example.

I implore the Président de Nesmond, and my very dear daughter, to be always kind to this dear community; to love them and to help them in every way; assisting them with their advice and protection, and helping them in their temporal necessities if they require it. I beg them to pay the interest of what may remain owing to the community from what I give to them. This good work will draw down great blessings upon both of them. I implore them to look upon it as their own community, where perpetual prayers will be offered up to God for them.

I beg of the Président de Nesmond, my very dear son-in-law, and my very dear daughter, to execute this present will, naming them for this purpose as executors; I beg of them to approve of my arrangements, and to perform this last service for me with the same affection and heartfelt love that they have always shown me during my life; and, in fulfilling

my wishes, as I expect from their virtue and affection, they will be rewarded by the blessing of God, which I hope they may receive in abundance ; they know that this fortune is not lost to them, and, on the contrary, that it will be of use to them in the other world, and even in this one.

I cannot refrain from expressing my gratitude to God for having given me the Président de Nesmond for son-in-law. He has shown me kindness beyond everything that I could have expected ; I thank him for it with all my heart.

As to my very dear and only daughter, she has never given me cause for dissatisfaction, but, on the contrary, has always shown me a sincere affection and great kindness, and has ever endeavoured to please me ; I should never end were I to say all I feel about her goodness. I pray God with all my heart to reward them for it in this world and in the next, and I ask a thousand blessings from God for them ; if He has mercy on me I will pray for them unceasingly ; and I give them my blessing from the bottom of my heart.

I say nothing to my dear daughter as to her future conduct, either temporal or spiritual, God having led her to do for both all that could be wished. I pray the divine goodness to continue His grace to her, and I beg of her to continue to be faithful to God, as God has given her the grace to be until now ; and this fidelity will obtain for her the necessary graces to persevere and advance in her spiritual life. I beg of her to pray to God for me ; I will do so for her, if I am found worthy of mercy.

I implore my very dear brothers to forgive me all the faults I have committed against them. I ask their pardon with all my heart ; I assure them that I die full of sincere affection for both of them, as I have always had all my life, and by this same tender love and affection I ask of them to interest themselves seriously in their salvation, as they will have to render a very exact account to God of their whole life at the hour of their death ; it is the greatest and most important of all affairs. I beg of them to set aside a quarter of an hour every day to think on the terrible affair of dying a holy death ; their soul ought to be dearer to them than their body, and eternity more than this life. I thank them for all the kindness they have shown me, I will pray to the Lord for them, if He has pity on me. I beg of them to live in good understanding and perfect friendship together,

and with the Président de Nesmond and my dear daughter, with my nephews and nieces, whom I also love very dearly, and to whom I wish all temporal blessings, but infinitely more spiritual ones. After all, what so soon passes away cannot be of real importance. I ask of them what I have asked from my dear brothers.

My dear daughter will find in a little memorandum several things which I owe; I beg her to pay the Bills at once unless she finds them already receipted.

I beg of our Lord to accept this will for His glory and my salvation, and that of M. de Nesmond and my daughter, and of all the family dead and living; I offer it to God with this intention. I apologise to my dear daughter if I do not leave much to her; if she had had a family I should have taken it into consideration, but God not having given her any, I thought she would not disapprove of my arrangements for the sake of the poor, and that God required it from me not only after my death, but also during my life.

I renounce all other wills and testaments, desiring that this one should take effect, and I count upon my dear daughter for everything, her will being mine, and I know how she loves me.

Made at Coubron, the 1st of August, 1688.

(Signed,) MARIE BONNEAU DE MIRAMION.

And lower down is written and signed, according to the act of deposit, To-day, 2nd of January, 1697.

(Signed,) MARIE DE BEAUHARNAIS DE NESMOND ET TARINON.

Then follows a *résumé* of the whole, the money left to charitable objects amounting to £20,300.

XI.

THE LAST ADVICE OF MADAME DE MIRAMION TO THE SISTERS OF SAINTE GÉNEVIÈVE, FOUND IN HER STUDY AFTER HER DEATH.

1696.

Blessed be Jesus!

THERE is nothing I desire so much, my dear sisters, as your perfection; if God has mercy on me, as I hope from His goodness, I will pray to Him for all of you, and for those who will form the community hereafter, that you may be faithful to your statutes and rules; because if you observe them faithfully, you will honour God, you will show Him your attachment and your love, and you will assure your salvation; look upon them as an abridgment of the commandments, the advices and the maxims of our Lord; as the summary of the doctrine and guidance of the holiest, the most learned, and the most experienced men who have been in the church of God from the beginning; and as the fruit and result of all the meetings and conferences which have been held during a great number of years by prelates, doctors, and other persons who are the most enlightened, the most pious, the most disinterested, and the most experienced of the kingdom, thanks to M. Ferret, Curé of Saint Nicolas, and our Superior, who had all these qualities in an eminent degree, and whose memory ought to be always held in affectionate veneration by you all.

In order to stimulate you to the fidelity that you ought to have to your institutions, reflect sometimes what are the intentions of Divine Providence in founding your community; the trouble and pains of those who started it; the great expense incurred for its temporal necessities; the prayers and good works which were employed to draw down the grace of God and the assistance of heaven on its spiritual wants; and say to yourself, "What does God require of me? After all this, was it really only to do what I do, that so much preparation was necessary; shall I, through my laziness, cause God's plans to fail? What account shall I render to Him if I do not contribute by my fidelity as much as I

can with the help of His grace, to the success of this institution for His glory, and for the relief of my neighbour?"

I implore of you also to reflect on what has happened in several great religious establishments in all ages. They flourished for many years, thanks to the zeal and the fidelity of the first religious, and then fell into an incredible decline, and even perished altogether through the infidelity of those who came after. Their misfortunes did not come all of a sudden; the neglect of one rule brought on the neglect of another, they relaxed their discipline by degrees; and at length everything fell into disorder, which was followed by the damnation of those who were the cause of it. Which of you, my dear sisters, would like by a small negligence to entail the ruin of your community? This will nevertheless happen if your fidelity should fall off; the misfortunes of others ought to serve as a warning to you. God is as just towards you as He was towards others. He will not withdraw his grace from you unless you abandon your duty; and you will have merited His displeasure all the more as you have so many examples of these sad falls, which they had not.

I cannot urge upon you sufficiently, my very dear daughters, the exact observance of your rule and constitutions, because there is nothing we ought so much to fear as the destruction of a work which God has raised up for His glory. I beseech you by the love that God has for you, and that which we owe to Him, remain firm in the practice of those things which are ordained for you, and remember the promises you have made to Him about them; I do not except one of them; for He will call you to account for all. Nevertheless I would recommend to you one or two of them more particularly, because they are of extreme importance, and several others depend on them.

1. Never cease to love and esteem your holy Order, as being established by the will of God according to the rules of His holy Gospel, and as a sure means of glorifying Him and sanctifying your own souls by good works.

2. Do everything as in the presence of God, for His love and His glory, even in the smallest things.

3. Avoid with the greatest care not only great faults, but everything which can be displeasing to God; His true love

requires it. As a general rule never do anything of which your will have to repent or be ashamed.

4. Receive in a proper spirit—that is to say, with humility and gratitude—the admonitions that any one may have the charity to address to you, whoever it may be, and endeavour to profit by them.

5. Examine yourselves every day upon your neglect of the duties of your state, as well as on your other faults, and see every month what progress you have made, or if you have gone back in the ways of God, in order to stir up your zeal to greater efforts. Do not look upon this as a thing of little importance; your retreat of one day every month will be well employed in this kind of self-examination.

6. Always make your confessions and your communions as if they were the first and the last of your lives.

7. Be exact at holy Mass and mental prayer; do not miss them from any fault of your own, because you thereby deprive yourself of many graces which God has attached to these exercises; the devil will do all he can to make you give up prayer, because he knows it is the means of making you firm in piety, and he would hinder you from advancing in virtue by dissuading you from it. If you should be obliged to give it up through infirmities or any other cause begin it again as soon as you can.

8. Keep up the affection you have for your parish church; go there regularly, and let your fidelity and devotion edify those who see you. Above all do not talk while there.

9. Love work; it is a part of our vocation; have some work always in hand when you are not busy with some affair or doing something by obedience. Time is precious, and idleness is the mother of many sins and the death of all virtues.

10. Whatever may happen to you, whether in spiritual or temporal things, never lose your trust in God, since he allows you to call Him your Father, and that His goodness is infinite.

11. Continue, my dear daughters, not to care much for society or the parlours; but if there be a necessity for your going, let it be with permission and with a companion if there be men in the

room ; never relax this rule ; it is of importance, and I beg it of you with all my heart.

12. Do not be ungrateful towards those who have done or may do good to you, either in spiritual or temporal things. Show them as much gratitude as you can during their life, and after their death. [3] Have a very great and particular gratitude for the late M. Ferret, to whose care the community is indebted for what it is, and pray also for your other Superiors.

13. When you are allowed to go to Ivry, amuse yourselves in the Lord with the intention of resting and refreshing your bodies and your minds, and gaining fresh strength for the better performance of your duties ; observe the rules which are drawn up for that house, take care to be quiet and thoughtful, and do nothing to offend against modesty or charity. Be on good terms with those who are given you as companions ; be simple and cheerful, and contribute as far as you can to their amusement. Do not, however, give up your spiritual exercises, and be submissive to her who is set over you.

14. Above all, my very dear children, I beg of you by the bowels of Jesus Christ to love and esteem each other with a perfect charity. If it be not from inclination let it be from principle, and give proofs of it on every occasion. Charity is the bond of perfection, and the abstract of the law of God. If we are obliged to instruct others in it, we ought to be full of it ourselves, as we cannot give what we do not possess. This virtue is the foundation of our community, which will be loved and esteemed only in proportion as its charity will be great.

15. I place obedience the last, although I look upon it as one of the principal virtues, and of the highest importance ; observe it in everything, and very rigidly with respect to all the Superiors and Superioresses that Providence may place over you ; without this habit your community will soon fall into confusion and come to nothing. Never be wanting in esteem and respect towards them ; receive all they say to you with humility, considering that God speaks in their persons. Fall upon your knees when they admonish you, and never justify yourselves ; do this as it is laid down in your rules and constitutions. I only speak in a very short and summary manner of all these practices, because the

reasons for them are amply explained in your statutes, the whole of which I beg of you to read at least four times a year, with all possible attention.

I implore of all the Superioresses who will come after me to make amends for all the faults which I have committed in the government with which God has charged me for more than thirty years. Let them pray and have prayers said to obtain my pardon from God. I acknowledge that I have not set the example I ought to have done, nor practised the necessary virtues; I have fallen far short of it. I hope that my neglect will not injure the community, and that the future Superioresses will better excite them in the performance of every duty by the good example they will give to all my dear sisters. It is what I desire with all my heart.

THE END.

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